

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT ALLAH

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Thesis submitted for the successful completion of Master of Philosophy

March, 2018

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

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Signed: _____ Dated: _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the blessings of Almighty God.

I want to give my appreciation and thanks to the following people who have assisted me throughout this study:

First of all, I would like to thank my previous principal supervisors, Associate Professor Kath Engebretson and Professor Ismail Albayrak and Associate Professor Irfan Ahmad to whom I am honestly thankful for their outstanding and important advice, support and encouragement.

I also wish to thank my Current Principal Supervisor, Dr Valerie Margrain who was generous with her time, knowledge and proficiency. Dr Valerie's inspiration for my work was most encouraging throughout this project. I would also like to express gratitude to Associate Professor Janeen Lamb for spending the time to confirm arrangements for finalisation of my MPhil thesis submission.

I would also thank my Co-supervisor, Dr Naser Ghobazadeh, who gave significant suggestions and comments for my thesis. I would also like to thank my Associate Supervisor, Dr Joshua Roose for his good advice about my study.

I would like to further extend my thanks to my colleagues at my present and previous schools, including the College where the research was conducted, for their continual reinforcement as well as reading and editing some sections of this study. I would also like to thank the Principal of the College, who allowed me to conduct this research. I also extend my humble appreciation for the years 4, 5 and 6 students who participated in this study and whose insights were the focus of this research.

Finally, I would like to express my deeply felt thanks and appreciation to my dear wife and children for their patience and understanding of the life of a full-time teacher and student. My special thanks to my parents, who provided me with the inspiration I needed to complete this study by their prayers.

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ABSTRACT

The increasing growth rate of the Muslim population in Australia highlights the importance of children being taught various aspects of Islam to gain a competent understanding about Allah. Diverse levels of government authorities in Australia affirm that children ought to be taken to learning environments where they will gain quality education and be provided positive impact on their lives. The process of teaching Islam is important as it lays a suitable platform through which children are given the adequate knowledge, belief, practice, rituals, and devotion.

The purpose of the study was to examine the different ways through which Muslim children are taught about Allah in a private K-12 Islamic school in Sydney. The study aims at determining children's beliefs (and questions) about Allah, the ways Muslim children learn about Allah, and, finally, textbooks' potential in effectively teaching the belief of Allah to Muslim children. The study explains the importance of supporting religious beliefs in children from a young age so that they can practice their religion and know how to converse with God. Data collection methods which explored various ways in which children learned about Allah included a questionnaires with 60 school children aged from 9-12 years, and interviews with teachers and parents. Document analysis review of relevant Islamic textbooks was also conducted.

Through the content analysis of these qualitative and quantitative methods, the study established that it is essential to introduce Islamic education to primary school children, especially since the children at the case study school demonstrated a strong commitment to their relationship with Allah. The findings of the study indicate that it is necessary to: change the dynamics in the learning environments; increase the number of Muslim teachers who are more eligible to teach Islamic ideas to children; urge key stakeholders in the education sector to equip

academic institutions with adequate materials; motivate teachers and parents to cooperate in supporting children to practice what has been taught in schools; have professional learning that takes a comprehensive approach; include diverse stakeholders in the readiness and execution of curricula and training of educators; and introduce new designs of the curricula and other instructive materials about religions and convictions.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Overview of Muslim migration to Australia

Historical data documents the arrival of Afghan Muslims by ship to Australia in the course of the nineteenth century, bringing camels. Many reminders of the presence of these workers are found throughout central and far western Australia where their camels provided transport through Australia's desert regions (Cleland, 2001). The Immigration Restriction Act (White Australia Policy) of 1901-1973, which impeded immigration of those other than the Anglo-Saxon descent, was partially lifted in 1967 when Muslim migrants began to arrive. At the time, because of the ongoing negotiations between the Turkish and Australian governments, Turkish workers were among the first to arrive in Australia (Yucel, 2010).

Indeed, we see very few Turkish Muslims arriving in Australia until 1967. By 1982, Mahmoudian and Carmichael (1998) indicate that over 24,000 individuals recognised as Turkish Muslims subsequently arrived in Australia. Records also show that a considerable number of Lebanese Muslim migrants entered Australia from 1970. Other Muslims came to Australia from Indonesia, Egypt, Sudan and many other countries, although not en masse until the 1990s. In the 2006 census data, there was an estimated 340,392 Muslims in Australia, which rose to 604,200 in the 2016 census. Muslims have become the nation's second-biggest religion, with the census recording proportion of overall population increasing from 1.7% in 2006 to 2.2% in 2011, to 2.6% in 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Most of Australia's Muslims live in Sydney (about two-thirds of the total) and Melbourne (about one-third). Additionally, an evaluation of the earlier 2006 census data shows that a majority of the Muslim population is composed of the young, with 81.89% of Australian-

born Muslims - who make up 37.9% of the total Muslim population under the age of 25 (adapted from 2006 census data).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the number of Muslims almost doubled from 341,000 in 2006 to 604,000 in 2016 census. The figures imply that the number of Muslim children is considerably high. With the growth of the Muslim population, and as the second most populous religion after Christianity, the need for Muslim children to be grounded in Islam faith is increasingly imperative to supporting faith. In fact, since the number of Muslims in Australia is projected to surge tremendously by 2025, the need for teaching Islam is ultimately profound.

Chapter one of this thesis provides brief information about Islamic pillars and an overview of Muslims in Australia. Chapter two highlights the importance of providing basic information about Islamic belief and practice to the Muslim children in Australia. Chapter three focuses on the methodology used in conducting the study. It elaborates on how and why a mixed methodology is used. Chapter four analyses the survey and interviews conducted to determine the Australian Muslim children's understanding of Allah. The same chapter also discusses the result of an interview with parent and the teachers. Chapter five identifies the textbooks which are used for teaching about Allah and Islamic principles. Finally, chapter six concludes the thesis with a summary of findings and recommendations.

1.2 A brief introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices

Though some of the Islamic practices are not easily comprehensible for children of the age group under study (see below), it is essential for them to begin understanding, as well as adopting and appreciating these practices, knowledge, and beliefs from an early age. Exploring children's understanding and teaching approaches are among the key objectives of the study.

1.2.1 Concept of God in Islam

The Islamic faith is founded on the belief that Allah is divine. Indeed, the Muslims affirm the belief that only Allah possesses a divine character. Nasr (2002) asserts that Allah is the creator and ruler of the universe, and a perfect being who should be accorded total devotion and worship. The teachings of the Qu'ran explain that Allah's name does not imply any gender. In Arabic "ilah" means "god" and the Arabic article "al" is the same as the English article "the". In fact, the use of the word Allah in Arabic can be compared to the use of the word God with the capital "G" in English to address the one and only God. Therefore, "Allah" means "the God". When Muslims and Christian Arabs speak about the word "Allah" in their scriptures, they literally mean "the God" (Buyukcelebi, 2005). Concisely, the word 'Allah' is unique since it possesses neither plural form nor gender. In this regard, the use of the term Allah to define God is unique and distinct in the context of Islam. Nonetheless, while Allah is most often identified with the pronouns *Hu* or *Huwa*, generally translated as *Him*, they can also be gender-neutral (Gülen, 2009). In this thesis the masculine is used to provide consistency and clarity to the reader.

The Islamic faith affirms the special and supreme nature of Allah. He is considered supreme owing to his godly attributes, being unlike anything else in His creation. Prophet Muhammad taught that Allah's inherent nature supersedes human understanding as cited in the following *Qur'anic* command as affirmed in *Shura* 42:11, which says "There is nothing whatever like Him". Indeed, the impression of God in the above quote resonates with the teachings in *Qur'an*, 50:16, whereby God is concerned with the wellbeing of human nature because at all times he is considered essentially close to us.

In Islam, God has 99 Divine names. Some of the terms used in the definition of God include All caring father, All-Knowing and Merciful, Compassionate, Bringer of Peace, the

Living God who is Mighty and all-Loving and Generous God who Avenges evil. Nusri (1994) argues that by attributing these phrases to Allah, Muslims perceive and reflect on the attributes that define God and attribute his existence to nature, universe and every sphere of their lives.

Rather than being concerned with the essence of God, Muslims seek to establish a personal relationship with God by resonating with His works and actions. Through such a perception, it is possible for Muslims to acknowledge His divine attributes. For instance, human beings know and uphold the belief that they cannot balance open space or the universe and therefore acknowledge the existence of a supernatural entity that balances the universe. The mystical being is God, who is the giver of life. Furthermore, Islam teaches that God provides human beings with freedom of choice. In turn, He asks them to apply justice and right choices in the human realm. Muslims believe that at death, one is accountable for their deeds in their earthly life in front of a Supreme Tribunal whereby absolute justice prevails (Nusri, 1994).

Muslims believe that Islam has come to end associating partners with God. Idolatry is prohibited in Islamic faith and Allah is the divine being to be worshiped by all Muslims. Indeed, Allah bears no limitations and is beyond comparison with any entity or being. No matter how holy an individual is, people can never be the object of prayer or worship. Acts of devotion should only be offered to God, not the intermediaries. There is a common stereotype held across different societies that Muslims worship Prophet Muhammad. However, this is not the case because the Prophet is fundamentally not divine, as taught in Islam. Unlike Allah, who is immortal, Muhammad died upon the accomplishment of his mission on Earth - to reveal Allah's message to Muslims and guide the lives of humanity (Gülen, 2009).

1.2.2 The five pillars of Islam

Like in many other religions, all Muslims are expected to put their faith into practice or action, because a mere belief is not just enough. Prophet Muhammad, the messenger of God,

thought that to make Islam easier to practice, Muslims should align their lives to correspond to five fundamental pillars of life (Trent, Osborne & Bruner, 2000). The five pillars are considered mandatory for every Muslim believer. Every believer is expected to fulfil the five pillars in order to be able to lead a good and responsive Muslim life. The five pillars are: *Shahadah* (faith), *Salat* (prayer), *Zakat* (alms), *Sawm* (fasting), and *Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Mecca). According to Lane, Redissi (2009), the Islamic faith is monotheist, but rooted in the five pillars and embodied on the teachings impacted by prophet Muhammad as well as the *Qur'an*.

Further, the Islamic faith is largely embodied in the teachings impacted by prophet Muhammad as well as the *Qur'an*. Islam is a term that in its literal form implies submission or total surrender. As such, Muslims can be viewed in the context of people who have surrendered themselves to God. Principally, the origin of the word Islam is coined from its Arabic translation 'Salam' which denotes peace. In effect, the Islamic faith requires that individuals submit themselves to God through total faith and devotion in pursuit of peace inherent to themselves, as well as the social context within which we live. Nonetheless, the believers' faith is not a misguided or blind devotion but an informed decision that is based on the ultimate realization of God's compassion and exceptional works in the universe.

Islam points to the religion, although there are a diversity of faith perspectives within Islam, whereas the concept of Muslim faith denotes individuals who have adopted Islam and its teachings in their daily life. "Mu'min" is prevalently used in the Qu'ran to denote a believer. The term implies that a person is defined by their religious identity as provided in the Qu'ran:

"Surely, some followers of the previous scriptures do believe in God and in what was revealed to you, and in what was revealed to them. They reverence God, and they never trade away God's revelations for a cheap price. These will receive their recompense in the most efficient reckoning" (*Qur'an*, 3:199).

Whereas a believer is not conferred with a distinct spiritual identity, the Qu'ran provides a clear guideline on the qualities that the believer should demonstrate. The qualities of believers include faith in God and the virtues they should demonstrate to qualify as a mu'min. The Qu'ran emphasises the need for believers to uphold their faith by defining the criteria of gauging the true believer. Once someone accepts Islam as their faith and means of life, it is obligatory upon that person to observe the five pillars of Islam with devotion. Islam is deeply rooted in these five pillars - faith, prayer as a ritual (*Salat*), fasting as recommended, *Haji* meaning pilgrimage, as well as almsgiving (*Zakat*).

Faith (*Iman*): All prophets, from the beginning of time, had been teaching the essentials of faith, which are the foundations of Islam: belief in God's existence and unity, the planet's final destruction, resurrection and judgment, prophethood and all the prophets, all Divine scriptures, angels, and the Divine destiny and decree (as well as human free will) (Buyukcelebi, 2005). True believers pronounce *Shahadah*, a simple expression of faith - "There is none worthy of worship except God (Allah) and Muhammad (*pbuh*) is the messenger of God." The importance of this acknowledgment is the profound belief that the key principle in life is to serve and worship God, which can be achieved through the practices and teachings of the Last Prophet, Muhammad.

Prayer (*Salat*): It is required that every believer prays five times on a daily basis. Islam knows no hierarchy and there are no priests but a learned person who is profficient in Qu'ran. More specifically, prayers are recited in different parts of a day - dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and the nightfall. The prescribed prayers are recited in Arabic, but believers may use their own language in invoking and praising God if they do not speak Arabic. Preferably, the Muslims worship together in a mosque but a Muslim is allowed to pray anywhere.

Fasting (*Sawm*): As one of the pillars of Islam, fasting is an essential discipline prescribed within Ramadhan, which occurs during the ninth month of the lunar calendar. Albeit children are not expected to observe the fasting of the month of Ramadan, they should understand this major Islamic practice (Ratcliff, 2008). Mentally healthy Muslims are required to refrain from eating, drinking and marital relations from dawn to sunset. Those who are ill or unable to perform their fasting due to various reasons can make up for their missed fasts later on and, if it is not possible for them to fast at all, they may make monetary donations sufficient to feed the poor (Hussain, 2011).

Obligatory charity (*Zakat*): According to Islamic teachings, each wealthy believer ought to give 2.5% of their cumulative annual revenue to those in need. The charity is not limited to financial giving. One of the key principles of Islam explains that everything belongs to God, and that riches are temporarily entrusted to human beings. The term *Zakat* refers to both “purification” and “growth.,” meaning that our property is “purified” by allocating a portion for people (society) in need, thus supporting the new growth.

Pilgrimage (*Hajj*): The pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) is mandatory for the Muslims who are physically and financially capable of doing it. *Hajj* can only be performed during the pageant of *Eidul-Adha* (celebrated annually on the tenth day of the twelfth Islamic month of *Dhu al-Hijjah*), and at this time every year over three million Muslims from all over the world come to Mecca. A pilgrimage to Mecca any other time of the year is named *umra* (or minor pilgrimage) (Eris, 2006). In order to be equal before God, pilgrims wear simple clothes that erase characteristics of class and culture. The custom of *Hajj* comprises going around the Kaaba seven times, and going between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times, to the likes of Hajira, Abraham’s wife, during her search for water. Afterwards, the pilgrims join in the common prayer for God’s forgiveness on the plains of Arafat, in what is considered an introduction to the

Day of Judgment. *Hajj* closes with a festival (the *Eid al Adha*) marked by prayers and the exchange of gifts in Muslim communities worldwide. In addition to this, *Eid al Fitr* (the end of *Ramadan*) is the second holiday in the Islamic calendar.

In Islam, *Salat* denotes the formal way of offering prayers and is considered a fundamental pillar of the Islamic faith. However, *Salat* differs considerably from the private prayer that is affiliated to the Christian faith. The aspect of Christian prayer can be associated with *Dua* in Islamic faith. Whereas a *Dua* can be offered either formally through documentation or informally by a recitation, these two approaches are fundamental to the Islamic faith. Principally, *Dua* has been coined from the Arabic term d-a-WA, which implies the decision to offer guidance to an individual, or even requesting someone, or grieving over a deceased individual.

In the context of the Qu'ran, *Salat* may function in the recital of prayers to God, the angels, and individuals. In the setting of applying *Salat* to God, it is implied that Allah sends his grace and mercy to people, whereas angels are given the ability to offer a petition for believers (Al-Ghazali, 2004). Muslims can offer prayer in both *Dua* and *Salat*. A number of Muslim scholars have argued that *Salat* as a formal prayer is important in intervening for the sick. Particularly, the recitation of *Salat* commences with believers invoking *takbir* (*Allahu akbar*) with their hands raised to the face level.

While offering *Salat*, the believer maintains an upward position, which is called *qiyam*. Afterwards, the person makes a recitation of certain verses from the Qu'ran, bow down in a ruku posture, stand upright an additional time, then lie down entirely in *sujud*. Once they have undertaken two *sujuds*, they are now in *julus* and at this point, the person sits up and makes a final recitation of salam simultaneously turning their head to face their right and left shoulders in a movement of quick succession. As the believers make these movements, they accompany

each of them with praises to God, for instance, Allah Akbar, which in English translates into God is great. It is a prayer that is offered to confer gratitude to God (Al-Ghazali, 2004, p. 4).

The *Qur'an* has many forms and representation of dua. Some of these forms include seeking aid (2:23), offering worship (10:106), exalting God (17:101) and proclaiming Allah's call to humans (17:52). The major aspect of *dua* is a form of worship between God and the believer. Nursi (1994) identifies three types of dua. In the initial dua, the person makes a request in their prevailing condition and gets the same thing - for instance, in case of a student seeking to excel in their exams. For such individuals studying and preparing for the exams is viewed as a dua. The second type of dua refers to a situation when a person prays for something and gets something else, which should be accepted, since Allah knows the best. In the third type, an individual prays for something and doesn't get it till the time he/she dies. This is the most valued type of dua since it will be rewarded in the hereafter. Individuals in a desperate situation also offer dua to come out of a hard, discomfoting situation (Nursi, 1994).

Although definitions of dua are differently conceptualised by a number of scholars, a common ground held among different scholars is that it is offered as a personal communication with God. The old scholars view dua as a way of making one's personal request made known to God. For example, the renowned poet, scholar and Pakistani theologian Muhammad Iqbal, who reigned between 1873 and 1938, considered dua as a deep expression of people's feelings for their creator (Dogan, 1997). On the other hand, as postulated by Nursi (1994), dua can also be regarded as the core element of worship, based on a certain level of spirituality and mystery since these prayers are addressing the invisible God (pp. 353-354). Furthermore, Gülen (1993) affirms that dua is made by the individual as they ask God to fulfill the needs that they cannot achieve through their human power. Conversely, Cilaci (1964) concedes that dua is a form of moving spiritual intentions from a lower human to a mighty and higher God. Besides, Kayiklik

(1994) considers the prayer as a method of creating unity between believers and their God since they can directly relay their message to God, once the existing obstacles have been addressed. As affirmed by Sufis, offering prayer to God is evidence of his infinite love for the human race, whereas the act of people seeking God through prayer is comparable to seeking something from a loved one. As conceded by Sufis, prayer can be considered as a medium used by God to reveal himself to people (Seriati 1993).

In Islam, therefore, prayer can be divided on the basis of their purpose - supplication or communicating a message. A prayer offered with the goal of communication implies that the person calls out to God to listen to their needs. On the other hand, communication prayers are subsequently categorised into a personal request to God, who reveals himself to a believer through a silent prayer from the heart. On the other hand, the individual can choose to remain silent, but recite a prayer through actions. However, through supplication, the individual is making their request known to God.

Muslim scholars claim that people need and yearn for faith or belief in a Divine being (Ay, 1996), and humans are created with a profound curiosity and desire to search for the Creator. They claim that, when people become distant from their Creator, the society struggles morally. According to Nursi (2007b), it is impossible to deny the fact that there is a Divine being in control and, according to the teachings of Islam, that Divine being is Allah. For Muslims, the purpose of life is found in belief in God, or, rather, Allah. Furthermore, Muslims believe that the aim of one's existence and creation is acquire the knowledge of Allah, and by this knowledge, one can progress on the path towards Allah. Leading a peaceful and tranquil family life is also achieved by staying on this path (Gülen, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2012).

1.3 Rationale

Over the recent decades, the number of Muslims in Australia has increased significantly. The study is driven by the need to introduce this major religion of Islam to children at an early age. Furthermore, the government affirms the right for children's culture and faith to be respected by schools, in partnership with families (Australian Curriculum Assessment & Reporting Authority [ACARA]; United Nations, 1989). Children have the right to be taught in learning environments where they can receive quality education on their faith, which will positively influence their lives. The need for Muslim education, especially in primary schools, is further motivated by the necessity to work in partnership with all parents, including Muslim parents (Bitá, 2015). Opportunities for children to be taught various aspects of Islam, including prayer, fasting, charity, faith, and the concept of God can be created both in school and home (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006). Teaching children about different aspects of a religion as well as attributes of God will ensure that children are well informed about how they can relate to God, not in terms of Divine Essence, but in terms of His Divine qualities. According to Ergin (2012), Islam advocates teaching children how to read the *Qur'an* since they need to understand the advantages of reading the Holy *Qur'an* and parents need to help them relate to it as the Word of God.

Like all religious communities, the Muslim community in Australia is guaranteed the right to educate their children on the fundamental Islamic beliefs. (Al-Atta, 2009). As provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, initiated in 1948, every individual has the right to exercise their religious freedom by freely manifesting their beliefs and religious practices, observing rituals, and worship, either privately or in public domain (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The Australian constitution upholds this right and provides the opportunity of having education at different schools so that parents may choose the form of education they

believe will help their children grow in religion (Huebner, 1999). The vision for education is to empower the children to live as Muslims and understand their unique, individual potentials.

The required educational curriculum should consider the emotional, ethical, and religious extents of the children's experience hence religious education permits the child to improve profound ethical values and learn more about Allah. As a part of the rules guiding national schools, religious education is an important part of the essential educational module (Irish National Teachers' Organization, 2003).

1.4 Objectives

The main aim for this study is to investigate various ways through which Muslim children are taught about Allah in a private K-12 Islamic school in Sydney. The study further seeks to determine children's beliefs about Allah and the potential of textbooks in effectively teaching the belief of Allah to Muslim children. An array of methodologies is employed to investigate the topic. Diverse strategies have been adopted to justify the methodology. Different methods allowing for the in-depth data analysis, as well as interpretation, have been employed to ensure quality feedback. Different data collection methods, interviews, and questionnaires, have been used to collect data from children, parents, and teachers in relation to the various aspects of how children are taught about Allah.

1.5 Outline of the chapters

Chapter Two highlights Islam as a minor religion in Australia (despite its growth in recent years). Due to its minority status in Australia, it stresses the importance of providing basic information about Islamic belief and practice to the children. It begins with an outline of Muslim education on how to introduce children to religion. From there it moves on to discuss important academic literature on approaches to religious education and socialization. It discusses, among others, stages of faith theory by J. W. Fowler and writings by Elkind as they

bear on this study. It then proceeds to dwell on the salience of textbooks and Gülen's educational philosophy vis-à-vis religious education amongst children. Chapter Three details the methodology used in conducting this study. It elaborates how and why a mixed methodology was deployed to explore the research question central to the thesis. It also dwells on different components of universe study, namely, children, teachers, and parents as well as the textbooks.

The purpose of Chapter Four is to determine children's beliefs about Allah and the significance of religious education textbooks in effectively teaching the belief in Allah to Muslim children. It analyses the survey and interviews conducted to determine the Australian Muslim children's understanding of Allah. There were 60 schoolchildren aged from 9-12 years that were involved in this study carried out in a Muslim majority school in Sydney, Australia. Additionally, teachers and parents were also interviewed. Chapter Five analyses the textbooks used in the study. As a major tool of the instruction of children, analysis of textbooks is vital to the study.. Furthermore, concerns and questions that gave rise to the research are also discussed and analysed at length in these findings chapters. The final chapter includes the conclusion and recommendations sections. The conclusion presents the summary of the study whereas the recommendations offer topics essential in future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This review of literature section will deal with the basics of Islamic faith and its transmission amongst children. Works discussed here have been chosen because of their direct relationship with the research questions - Fowler's stages-of-faith theory has specifically been the focus of the study.

This theory highlights the development of faith in children at different ages. The theory outlines the developmental stages as the intuitive-projective stage (2-6/7 years of age) the mythical-literal faith stage (6-12 years of age), and the synthetic-conventional stage (12 years of age). Fowler incorporates an interview to prove the theory. Since only one experiment was referred to in the theory, it does not wholly substantiate the idea of development of faith in children. Fowler's theory is largely restricted to the cognitive realm and ignores other dimensions of faith, such as forgiveness, which is a crucial component of religion.

Elkind's investigation on mental progress related to religious understanding has also been integrated into the study. The research carried out by Elkind complements Fowler's theory and research done by Piaget (1932) . According to Elkind, there are three distinctive developmental themes: perceptual development, issue of egocentrism, and religious development (Hyde, 2012). These two theories are significant in comprehending growth of religion in young children from an early age. Different stages in both theories can be applied to the day-to-day aspects surrounding the development of religion in children.

Since their establishment, Islamic schools have been rapidly growing in Australia and are currently regarded as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the state. Some schools are expanding rapidly to the extent that their growth has compelled them to freeze the lists of new

students. Prior to this, for instance, the number of Islamic schools in New South Wales was in the range from 15 to 22.

The total population of students in Islamic schools has presently doubled to over 10,000. Most of these schools have also recorded high levels of academic performance, considering the fact that half of those employed as teachers in the schools are not necessarily Muslims or of Islamic origin. Islamic schools in Australia also have higher percentages of students who come from mostly non-English speaking countries (Hattie, 2009). This development underlines the necessity of possessing Islamic education as a religious study within learning environment to incorporate an understanding of Islamic concepts at an early childhood. This requires the schools to be equipped with learning materials related to Islamic teachings.

2.2 Religious education for Muslim children in Australia

As with other religious communities, the Muslim community in Australia has the right to educate its children on their own religion. The Australian constitution upholds this right and provides a diverse range of schools so that parents may choose the form of education that they believe will help their children grow in their own religion. This right was also recognised by the United Nations in 1989, as governments worldwide adopted the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, also known as CRC or UNCRC. This declaration aims to ensure the protection of children's rights, including cultural, linguistic and religious rights, and the right to education.

When parents choose a religiously oriented school for their children, it can be assumed that they hope for some level of religious socialization for their child. Like all religions, Islam has a corpus of teachings that are accepted and taught objectively as the story and tradition of the religion. Again, like all religions, and especially in secularised nations like Australia, Islam faces the problem of transmitting its beliefs and teachings to the future generations (Berger, 1990) and of having the succeeding generations legitimate these (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

This problem is particularly addressed in the religious socialization of the young. The new generation is initiated into the meaning of the culture, learns to participate in it, to accept or analyze the roles as well as the identities that make up its social structure, and to contribute to its future or participate in its transformation.

The future of any religion in the Western world assumes that among those who will carry it forward there will be “knowledge and experience” of the religion as it is now and a robust religious socialization that has been personally negotiated and constructed. Scholars of religions have found there is a surprising agreement about the ways in which religiosity is manifested. Two of the most enduring sociologists of religion, Rodney Stark (2000, 2004) and Charles Glock (1973, 1976) have agreed on five dimensions of religiosity that are manifested in a religiously socialised person across nations and religions (Stark & Glock, 1970). The first of these are *beliefs*. In general, the religious person holds the tenets of the religion to be true although there are always variations in the content and scope of these beliefs. This dimension, consisting of understandings regarding the nature of reality and the nature of the disposition of the supernatural, is fundamental to all other dimensions and is at the heart of religiousness. The second is the *religious practice*, meaning the things that religious people do to carry out their religious beliefs. There are two aspects of religious practice, the first being formal rituals that are expected of all adherents and the second being devotion, which consists of personal acts of worship and prayer that are informal and private. Both religious practice and devotion take place within the framework of belief and are incomprehensible apart from it. The third dimension is a *religious experience*, which involves contact and communication with the Divine. The fourth dimension is *knowledge*, closely related to belief, which means the religious person has at least basic information about the religion, its beliefs, rites, texts, and traditions. The last dimension is what Stark and Glock (1970) refer to as *consequences*. This refers to the ways in which

religiosity affects the life of the believer every day, the resulting effects it has on their decisions and the ways in which they act and relate in the world. Although the most important agent of religious socialization is the family, religiously operated schools have an important part to play in it, especially, but not exclusively, through their religious education curriculum.

2.3 Introducing Muslim children to the concepts of God and prayer

It is important for parents to teach their children to thank God when they receive something. This can be done by saying Alhamdulillah, meaning “All praise is to God, for everything they receive. Even if a child thanks his/her mother for the tasteful food she has prepared, she should teach the child to thank God for all His blessings. Kindness, blessings, and beneficence showered upon us by God are uncountable, which is why parents should teach their children about His mercy. The home environment is the most important factor to be considered when a healthy generation has to be brought up. If the family has proximity to God, then automatically the children are inclined to be the same. The family is expected to be honorable, righteous and cognizant of relevant aspects, even if one of the parents strongly believes in God and His will to provide the blessings of daily life (Buckingham, 2010).

When the Prophet Mohammad prayed in the mosque, he would take his granddaughter Umamah, keep her on the ground at the time of prostration and put her on his back when he stood up. This story is a guide for the rest of the Muslim generations to indicate that children should be motivated to attend mosques and visit their gardens so they remain inclined towards attending regularly when they grow up (Suwayd, 2005). The Prophet never had a harsh attitude towards children and did not force them to visit the mosques to pray; he believed that this goal would be better achieved through love and affection. Children should be given the opportunity to attend at their own free will and conscience, to make sure they are comfortable with their actions, belief, and trust in their Creator (Yin, 2003).

When talking about the prescribed daily prayers, it is recommended that the father take the child to his/her mother when she prays and provide him/her the opportunity to observe how it is done. Through this observation and participatory approach, the child will be able to absorb the spiritual depth which abides in praying, once they are old enough to intellectually engage in the learning process. A prayer is one of the most important and closest acts of worship – this way, the child will be inclined to be as close to God as his parents (Ay, 1996). Many children pose questions about Islam to their parents - it is necessary to make them feel comfortable to ask openly about religious issues (Sully, 1986). Understanding the emotional needs of children becomes a difficult task. Looking at an individual, one may not realise the inner feelings and aspirations that one has, mostly because children, and human beings in general, are made up of souls and spirits. When the spirit is not at peace with the soul, an individual may be suffering from emotional distress or something of that sort (Al-Alawni, 1991). Parents ought to take care of their young ones and guide them whenever they need their help. In addition, they should watch over them, providing support and guidance. Thus, any change occurring in children's life should be noticed by their parents immediately. Religious studies should not be used as a source of stress for the young ones but parents should rather ensure that the young ones are well prepared for the studies. This means that their psychological status needs to be stable enough to handle the kind of information given by the instructors of religious courses.

The teachings of Prophet Mohammed clearly stipulate that parents are solely responsible for their children's welfare. This indicates that they are the custodians of law, values, and customs and should pass these values to the young generations (Hussein, 2011). At this point, children ought to learn about God and the religious values from parents before enrolling in school. Spiritual growth progresses hand-in-hand with physical growth of an individual, especially for children advancing from one stage to another (Trent & Bruner, 2000). According

to Al-Atta, the level of study should commensurate the stage of life (2009). This indicates that a 9-year-old child may not necessarily be taught the same material and in the same manner as a 6-year-old or a 12-year-old, due to their unequal intellectual and cognitive development, as well as maturity. A 12-year-old child can handle and process more information compared to a 6-year-old. These differences would form the basis for the development of a curriculum that incorporates the specific needs of a certain group (Al-Atta, 2009).

Hefner (2009) suggests that places should be established for conducting prayers. Thus, people need to perform religious practices (such as the prayers) at home, with their families, in order to prompt children to pray as well and, if place and time are already determined, they can be prepared accordingly. If a child is taken to the mosque, he/she must feel secure and happy about going there. Occasionally, a mother is unable to perform her prayers (during menstruation and post-natal bleeding), which is why taking children to the mosque may be appropriate. Looking only at their mothers, children may feel that praying is optional and it may be skipped at times. It is essential to remove such misunderstanding and, if it is not possible to take the child to the mosque, mother should act as if she is praying, sit on the prayer rug, open her hands and ask God Almighty for His blessings. Through this act, not only does she gain further blessings from God, but also teaches her children how it needs to be done at all times (Al-Atta, 2009).

Other researchers assert that, when a child is being brought up, it is necessary to handle these aspects in an effective manner (Al-Atta, 2009). If the child has realised their true worth in front of God, they will always make sure they are already prepared for the prayer during or before the *adhan* (call to the prayer). They will also tell their parents to go pray even if the *adhan* is not heard and it is time for the prayers. This way the parents will always reap the fruits of their labor, and this is why they are advised to devote some of their time to God for the

benefit of their own and for the benefit of their children. The prayers should only be performed for the sake of God and all refuge is to be sought from the Creator of humankind since He is the Most-Merciful of the merciful. If one prays to God aloud, the children around will be able to hear and learn from this ardent prayer.

According to Ergin (2012), another important educational task in Islam is to teach children *Qur'an* reading. The children need to understand the advantages of reading the Holy *Qur'an*, and parents need to help them relate to it as the Word of God. Presently, one of the most important issues children face is that the mind of the most people is focused only on the sounds of the verses when reciting the *Qur'an*. It is believed that when the *Qur'an* is recited in a proper manner, then Allah and His Messenger are happy and all those around also benefit from such recital (McNeilage, 2013). If parents shed tears while reciting the *Qur'an*, the children would be able to feel the intensity of love and awe the parents have for their Creator. If the *Qur'an* is recited without giving its due worth, then it is possible that insensitivity towards the Divine words will emerge.

The Islamic faith has its foundations, the first and foremost of these being *Tawheed*, or the belief in God (Nursi, 2007a). This concept needs to be given high importance since the entire belief of Islam is based on it. A believer's failure to maintain their faith in God and His oneness implies that individual does not believe in the monotheistic religion of Islam either. When children reach of the recommended age, which is usually between seven and nine years, the sacred notions of Islam should be planted in their heart with love and care. Every now and then, parents should talk about how important the belief in God is and how He should be made a major part of a person's life in all the acts and phases of their lives. They should be aware of the necessity to follow the example of the Messenger of God, the Best of Creation, who has clearly shown the right path to the believers (Gülen, 2002).

Everything a person considers sacred should also be reflected in his or her actions. For instance, the *Ka'ba* in Mecca is a sacred place towards which the believers turn during the daily prayers; therefore, as one talks about the *Ka'ba* it is necessary to do it with high level of respect (Nursi, 2007b). When Muslims enter the close vicinity of the *Ka'ba* or Medina, they should be filled with respect as they visit these places as a pilgrim.

Hence, it can be said it is a duty of all Muslims to show their children the straight path and encourage them to worship God properly. The faith and basic pillars of Islam, along with the verses to be recited during the prayers, are the fundamentals of Islam that need to be taught to the children in order to save them from the evils of the world. If a child is brought up in a pure surrounding and he/she becomes obedient worshipper of God, then it is possible to attain the blessings promised by their Creator in this world and the next.

According to a *hadith*, the word 'Allah' should be taught as the first word for the baby to utter (Heysemi, 1987). Parents should teach the toddlers intently how to say 'Allah' (Ay, 1996). If a child learns how to say 'Allah', he/she will gain the experience of making *dua* to Allah at an early stage of life. This clearly shows us that a child can be taught to start making *dua* at an extremely young age. *Dua* is an essential refuge for a child for the purpose of fulfilling childhood desires (Ay, 1996).

The Noble Prophet's instruction to parents does not imply that parents enforce restrictions on their children, but encourage them to make prayer a habit from a tender age. According to Gülen (2002), there ought to be space and time for performing prayer in congregation either at home or at the mosque. In addition, one should spare certain amount of time every day to pray to God so that children can understand the importance of the prayer in a person's life. Moreover, it is better to pray aloud next to children. This clearly indicates the

necessity to teach children how to pray; one should do the prayers in a way that they can be heard by the children.

2.4 Religious education for religious socialization

For most of the people, the beginning of religious socialization occurs at a very young age. Religion is acquired through the interaction with parents and other adults in everyday life. Adopting a religion and its practices is a result of having been exposed to it on a daily basis. Children learn to understand the meaning of life and the moral values according to religion, its teachings and the basic principles of the belief system mostly from the people they interact in their daily lives, primarily their parents (Bretherton & Waters, 1985), relatives and other adults around them. Learning about and living according to the requirements of a particular religion leads children to religious socialization. The norms of children's lives, the rules, and customs, the way of worshipping and religious holidays are determined by the religious beliefs of children.

For children from certain religious backgrounds, education and courses on their own religion are important and necessary. In lives of many people, religion plays a pivotal role and gives a sense of meaning to life. A person has not only physical or materialistic needs (such as money) but also spiritual needs (Vakkasoglu, 2006). Everyday lives of people committed to religion, will certainly be shaped by their faith. Their faith gives them responses to their questions about the spiritual world. Believing in a Divine Being helps relieve believers' anxiety and negative feelings (Yucel, 2010).

2.5 Approaches to religious education for religious socialization

2.5.1 Cognitive dimension

There are two important dimensions of religious education – cognitive and affective. The cognitive dimension is focused on knowledge and deals with progress in knowledge and skills,

such as beliefs, ritual practices, social structure, history, ethical positions, symbols, stories or texts of a particular religious tradition (Donohue Clyne, 2001). Cognitive learning outcomes are generally set out in clear statements that indicate the knowledge and skills intended for the students to achieve by the end of a lesson. In addition, cognitive learning outcomes allow students and teachers to interpret clearly the need for specific levels of achievement (Clyne, 2001).

2.5.2 Affective dimension

In the affective process, the effect of the content needs to be considered. Thus, integrating content with life experiences is paramount to studies. This enables a personal and creative response to the content. The affective dimension is indirectly based on the intellectual approach and naturally leads to it. The affective domain allows the student to internalise the knowledge content and has the potential to touch a display of feelings and reflective capacities (Oser & Reich, 1996). The affective dimension is difficult to control in terms of whether intended outcomes have been achieved in a lesson, as it is more of a development of feelings, reflections, values, attitudes and faith. Entering the affective dimension may involve an experience of inner change and not all students are ready to do this at a particular or given time (Oser & Reich, 1996). The combination of cognitive and affective dimensions of religious teachings is referred to as the educational approach to religious education (Oser & Reich, 1996).

According to the educational approach to religion, the learning of religion, and thus, religious teaching, is essential for all students in terms of development and building of a just society. Buchanan (2007) goes on to assert that religious teachers offer opportunities for the reflections, thoughts, prayers, and considerations that belong to the achievement of affective outcomes (Buchanan, 2007). An outcomes approach can be seen as the formalization of religious education; that is, teaching it through a religious education curriculum with a set of

outcomes to achieve, similar to other curriculum subjects. This approach is more accurate and consistent when compared with other strategies of measuring students' learning and achievements (Buchanan, 2007). The cognitive aspect of religious education focuses on the content of knowledge, whereas the affective aspect focuses more on the students' personal interaction with the knowledge. That is, the affective aspect is an emotional connection, and can be concerned with personal faith and values (Buchanan, 2007).

2.5.3 Cognitive and affective theory of religious in relation to Muslim schools

Religious education in Muslim schools can be taught using the emotional and intellectual approach to education. These dimensions are interlocked processes that allow students to learn about religion based on specific outcomes. The cognitive dimension refers to students objectively and systematically learning outcome-based content e.g. religious beliefs, ritual practices, social structure, history, ethical positions, symbols, stories, and texts. Cognitive outcomes should be set out by the teacher using clear statements in order to indicate the exact knowledge and skills intended for students to achieve by the end of the lesson, as stated by Buchanan, Gordon, and Schuck (2008). In addition, according to Buchanan et al., (2008), cognitive dimensions and the affective process are interlocked in order to assist students in making sense of what they learn and relate it at a personal level. This involves students associating what they have learned with what they already know. It also requires students to integrate this understanding into their lives in order to make it more meaningful. The role of a teacher is to make implicit settings more explicit and provide opportunities for self-reflection. This should be done with outcomes that relate to cognitive learning. However, it is important to note that affective learning outcomes are not achieved fully in one lesson. This is because they cater for the development of personal and internalised religious understanding, which is more

complex and may take longer than learning outcomes based on knowledge and skills, as stated by Buchanan (2007).

2.5.4 Fowler's stages of faith

The section of the literature looks into the development of faith in children at different ages, particularly in view of the theory of faith development put forward by Fowler (1981).

2.5.4.1 Stage 1: Intuitive-projective faith: 2-6/7 years of age

The intuitive-projective stage of faith development, according to Fowler, ranges from ages 2 to 6, or even 7. The intuitive projects are considered ideal in this stage since children have the capacity to apply symbolic knowledge and models of enhancing speech to augment their perception into meaningful units. Children are increasingly curious between the ages of 2 and 3 years, and constantly ask 'what' and 'why' questions. These children demonstrate cognitive egocentrism, as they are not yet able to coordinate their perspective with another intuitive-projective child. Older children at this stage demonstrate rich imagination and grasp of symbols. In the progress of Fowler's research, an interview was conducted with a six-year-old boy named Freddy from a Catholic family and a four-and-a-half-year-old girl named Sally who had not been exposed to religious symbols by her parents (1981). The children were given scenarios that led to religious thoughts and were asked questions about God and belief in God. Children who had been previously exposed to a rich range of symbols used to form images associated with God and the sacred. However, children coming from non-religious homes showed similar tendencies, but with a lot more limitations.

Children were also asked the kinds of things that made them afraid. Their responses showed that children in this age range have strong imagination, whereas reality and fantasy are mixed. It is clear from Fowler's emphasis on imagination and fantasy in this age group that adults can exploit the imagination of a child. In effect, teaching children is largely dependent on

the quality of the images and narrations we present to them to influence their imagination. Children should also be given the chance to talk freely about their ideas, the ‘images’ they create (Fowler, 1981). According to Fowler, a religious awakening emergence is evident in children between the ages of two and six. Aside from a mere rote learning of religious facts, there was a number of questions regarding emotional issues (Ay, 1996). If we consider the psychological status of children, understanding their developing religious questioning will be eased. It is at this age that children display behavior such as imitation, like animation, egocentrism, stubbornness, anti-social behavior and curiosity. It is at this stage that children have a desire to be accepted by their surroundings and are eager to show that ‘I exist as well!’ (Ay, 1996). Some of these behaviors are more intense than others and some are more evident than others.

2.5.4.2 Stage 2: Mythic-literal faith: 6-12 years of age

The stage in which a person begins to accept and identify themselves with the stories and beliefs of their community is referred to by Fowler (1981) as mythic-literal faith. Symbols are a way of understanding their world through imagination. Stories add to this and provide an opportunity for unity. Individuals at this stage are aware of concepts, such as being just and fair and the characters in the stories are affected by symbolic occurrences of either good or evil. A mythic-literal child is able to recount the story with the exact details; however, he/she cannot derive an analytical meaning or message. At this stage, according to Fowler, there is a “danger” of being too literal, as it can become overpowering and too controlling. The transition to stage three will facilitate individuals to notice certain flaws or contradictions in the myths. This is when the reflection in meanings will take place. These types of contradictions in the literature must be dealt with, as they do happen in reality (Fowler, 1981). For the purposes of this

research, which focuses on primary school children, Fowler's stages one and two are most relevant.

Children between seven and nine years are usually more interested in the oneness of a sole Creator. They are curious about a number of attributes pertaining to their Creator such as His size, where and how He came about, why there is only one and not any other. They are more concerned with how they need to understand their Creator. In addition, children at this age also view their Creator as the One who is the mightiest, most powerful, the Creator of everything, the One who oversees everything, the Creator of all humans, protector, sustainer and provider of all. The understanding of their Creator is evident at this stage (Ay, 1996, p. 112). For pedagogical purposes, in order to effectively explain the oneness of the Creator, teachers can use the 'see and observe' method, such as observing the creations of Allah in order to understand that He is the Creator, to accept that He is benevolent and fair to all His creations. To explain the existence of the Creator, teachers should try to use real-life examples. They should reward children's curiosity and questions with valid answers. They should encourage children to be observant of their surroundings and to be more aware of the colors, shapes, and textures that surround them and to think constantly of the Creator who created it all. In addition, raising the awareness of the unique design that runs in the universe is another important point. According to Muslim educators, this is a significant step in the process of the child getting to know, explore, believe and, most importantly, love their Creator (Selçuk, 1990).

2.5.4.3 Stage 3: Synthetic-conventional: Age 12

At this stage, faith has more places in the day-to-day living and outlook of a person's life, though these values will be based more on the ideologies and judgments of the authoritative leader or group. An individual within this stage will not reflect on what faith means even though they may have deeply felt ideologies, and thus will not be fully aware of them. One limitation of

this stage is that since the individual is internalised with the authority's ideologies, others' differing judgments can lead to betrayal or despair, which in turn would result in a breakdown. This is often the age when the peer group becomes more important than the family and the religious group. Through self-reflection, values, and background, individuals will make the transition to the next stage (Fowler, 1981).

2.5.5 Critique of Fowler's theory

Fowler's work has been criticised for its use of low-scale and insignificantly varied samples; later researchers have broadened the sample size. For example, by applying the concept of "face plausibility" to Fowler's theory, Barnes et al. (1989) devised one of the most universally accepted questionnaires used to assess the stages of faith (Timpe, 1999). To assess the comprehension of the characteristic manners of the second to the fifth phases, a forced option instrument to be applied to adults was deemed as the best option by Barnes et al. It comprised nine paired statements and each statement was concurrent to the characteristics defined by Fowler to explain these stages. These statements were a determined attempt to mirror Fowler's stage differences. One of the paired statements had to be selected by the person taking the survey. In total, five statements are presented to cover stages three through five.

Three statements were reflective of stage two - the reason for this was the deficient amount of longitudinal data and an adequately diverse age group needed to decide if the sample group experienced the stages in chronological order or not. According to Barnes et al., the dissimilarities are not of faith "styles" but "stages" (1989). This explanation covers more generalised stage characteristics - for stage three, the apprehension toward the standards of the group and for stage four, a the willingness to bring all aspects of reality on a single junction. Despite the facts, these characteristics were more generalised and not exactly classifiable to Fowler's seven structures. Moreover, this model does not include stages one and six, as they are

not repeatedly observable in adults. One statement that explains Fowler's second stage is that God is a rewarder to those who adhere to his teachings and as such, loving one's neighbor is viewed as a pursuit that should be approached with an open mind.

Secondly, some argue that Fowler has not adequately defined what he means by "religion"; for instance, according to Moran (1987), Fowler's definition of religion is restricted to the cognitive realm, whereas it ignores other dimensions of faith. As postulated in Fowler's theory, religious development is advanced from a cognitive approach, and this tends to omit some of the profound religious virtues, for instance, forgiveness (Fernhout, 1986). Indeed, such inadequacy highlights the link between the evaluation of religious progression benchmarks and the evaluation of the religious development model (Parker, 2006). In terms of religious development measures, most scholars ought to be acquainted with the need of ensuring that the instruments they use are reliable and valid. Nonetheless, these researchers should also be aware that validity and reliability do not always address the aspects of theoretical adequacy as observed by Clore and Fitzgerald (2002) and Streib (2005).

Webster (1984) critically questions the research method applied by Fowler, arguing that the theory should not be applied at a normatively because the majority in the sample group were white and Christian. Moreover, Webster question the rationale for selecting only seven aspects to each stage from a wide array of options. In addition, Fowler's theory was driven by the works of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Selman, and Webster (1984) questions the modifications that Fowler made to their works. Webster also specifically criticises the reliability of Kohlberg's work, which in turn raises questions about the reliability of Fowler's work. Webster points out that Kohlberg was believed that moral development is a stage of faith development, whereas Fowler negates this notion (Webster, 1984). In addition, Kohlberg worked in a hierarchical manner, while Fowler's work cannot be included in such a classification. However, Smith (1992) does

not agree with Webster and, according to her, Kohlberg and Fowler present resonating viewpoints using a distinct approach.

2.5.6 Elkind

In the U.S., David Elkind's investigation about mental progress regarding religious understanding was one of the first works to be published. "Elkind is responsible for demonstrating the studies done by Piaget in front of the viewers from America, also for copying several studies revealed by Genevan, and the first studies to be printed regarding cognitive development in the context of religion were his" (Hyde, 1990, p. 18). For Elkind, three developmental themes were of focus: perceptual development, issue of egocentrism and religious development. Elkind conducted an interview among 790 children aged between 5 and 11. According to these children's responses, he concluded that children represented one of the three stages of development. Personal religion was seen as including sensations, ideas, and behavior, in relationship to other people, with animals, or with nature (Elkind, 1978). He considered that it was hard to understand and observe personal religion. Elkind conducted an examination on the trends on the modernization of religious activities among children. Through the affirmation that religious growth can only be initiated through intellectual development, Elkind advanced the argument that reasoning needs to be backed by positions, whereby these are manifested in the different phases of development among children (1970, 1978). In one research example, children demonstrate saving habits, association with others and independently express their opinions; which supports developing of understanding religion by reading the scripture as well as the practice of prayer, reading scripture and worshiping God.

Studies in this field conducted by Fowler and Elkind focus exclusively on specific groups, such as white Christians and Americans, respectively. In this study, I will employ the

stages proposed by Fowler and Elkind (see Figure One) to study the Muslim children in my case study school.

| Stage I (ages 5-7) | Stage II (ages 7-9) | Stage III (ages 10-12) |
|--|--|--|
| Children of these ages have the same kind of thinking, understanding and approach; thus, the impressions regarding religion's uniqueness for these children is also the same. Children's ability to differentiate between a people of different religions such Protestants, Jews or Catholics is not usually established (Elkind, 1970). | Children become more intelligent and develop the idea of religious belief or associated thoughts. At the second stage, a child selects particular references, characteristic of different denominational groups and primary actions. At this stage, children express their religious identities according to their experiences with religious rituals, forms of worship and family relations (Elkind, 1970). | Children transform their thinking further in terms of religious faiths, as they begin to engage in higher order thinking about different religious groups. During this period, children begin to understand differences between their belief, ways of worship and other religious denominations or religions (Elkind, 1970). |

Figure One. Summary of Elkind's stage theory.

2.5.7 Relevance of Fowler and Elkind's ideas for Muslim children

Fowler's approach to faith in distinct stages looks into growth and development of faith in children at different ages. The theory outlines the developmental stages as the intuitive-projective stage (2-6/7 years of age) the mythical-literal faith stage (6-12 years of age) and the synthetic-conventional stage (12 years of age). The children were given scenarios that led to religious thoughts and questions about God and belief in God. This presents the first initial shortcoming of the theory because Fowler only used one type of experiment to develop his theory. In addition, Fowler's theory was restricted to the cognitive realm and ignored other dimensions of faith, such as forgiveness. Forgiveness is a crucial component of religion and its omission does not augur well with critics of the religious theorem. In carrying out his research, Fowler's sample comprised of Christians from the West, and therefore this cannot be used as

representative of all members from a society that is made up of numerous religions and an equally large number of ethnic and racial groupings. The fact that Fowler's work was drawn from the previous works of Piaget, Kohlberg and Selman also raises concerns as to the appropriateness of the research for contemporary education. Western contemporary education has a socio-cultural, non-normative and strength-based approach (Claxton & Carr, 2004).

Elkind's (1981) investigation about mental progress regarding religious understanding was one of the first works to be published. As opposed to Fowler's theory, Elkind's theory focused on three developmental themes; perceptual development, issues of egocentrism and religious development. As in the case of Fowler's theory, Elkind's sample was made up of white and Christian children and therefore was not a representative of the whole as it lacked diversity. Just like Fowler's theory, Elkind's theory does not identify the basic essence of religion and the belief and practice of the partakers.

Overall, the two theories are imperative in promoting understanding and nurturing religious development among young children beginning from an early age, as the different stages in both theories can be applied to the day-to-day aspects surrounding the development of religion in children. Nevertheless, neither of the theories completely fits the case of Muslim children. Despite the existence of many similarities between Islam and Christianity, there are also differences between them. Elkind and Fowler draw their conclusions from single experiments involving white Christian children, whereas Muslim students come from many different ethnic, social and traditional backgrounds.

2.5.8 Issues in Muslim religious education

2.5.8.1 Training for prayer

According to Trent, Osborne and Bruner (2000), young children should be taught that they can converse with God regarding any subject as God can hear them. Capehart (2005) and Helm

(2008) discussed whether teachers at school should also introduce young students to a variety of prayers and ask them to learn praying to God using them. Usually, teachers fail to introduce to young learners about the subject of prayer and God. According to Watkins (2008), the manner in which children are engaged with God in praying and convincing Him is also worth learning from their adult teachers. What Somers (2006) has observed is the fact that young children become involved in praying to God with complete devotion, and so teachers should be involved in supporting them from an earlier age.

2.5.8.2 The importance and role of parents

According to Shultz (1998), parents are the initial instructors of a child's life; hence, the responsibility of teaching children to study and remain in contact with God is not solely the responsibility of their teachers. As posited in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, there are a number of contextual influences on a child's learning. The mesosystem is the component of the ecological system which indicates the environment where children spend most of their time. Boyatzis (2008) emphasised that scholars and experts should also study the association between the home and preschool while checking on the children's spiritual development.

According to Bellous, de Roos, and Summey (2004), to be converted, to be a good Christian, to read and learn the stories related to Bible and to become God-fearing and to learn how to pray are the general basic goals which should be included in religious education. However, Wangerin (2003) stated that the objectives can be attained through comprehensive spiritual practices offered by the strong belief-based religious school.

The role of parents is to engage in strategies that gives them the authority of a religious teachers and supportive custodians as provided in the scripture (Schultz, 1998) and spiritual

nurture (Stone-house & May 2008). Hattie stated that students' effectiveness at school was directly proportional to the role of their families in their education (2009). However, the topic of the parent-school relationship still needs to be further studied in terms of the role of the guardian/parent in educational institutes and the increased influence and participation of parents over the years (Saul, Wick, Muller, Social Research, 2006). Leithwood and Steinbach (2002) suggested that schools that were experiencing challenges could more strongly emphasise the relationship between parents and schools so that families contribute to education at a domestic level and supportively help development of the students.

Although the topic of the parent-school relationship requires a great deal of focus, it is not always given much importance in educational research because there are other more pressing factors that play a significant role in students' education. The approach is being addressed in a number of studies based on Australian educational research as well as elsewhere (Anderson, 2006). Spry and Graham contributed a list of the chief elements of Australia's parent-school linkage and depicted an early application of the "relationship" project, as financed by Lismore Catholic Education.

Islamic schools in Australia have been the focus of research within the last five years. However, only a few of them have introduced the participation of parents in the school's education program. Investigations found out that Muslim parents participated at a lower level in non-Islamic educational institutes than Islamic ones because of cultural, language and employment differences (Clyne, 2001). The study conducted by Clyne put limited emphasis on Islamic schools, although there are two major reasons why research must be conducted over the Islamic institutions in Australia. The first reason is that there was an increase in the number of Islamic believers in Australia. Secondly, with more Muslims, there is a greater demand for educational institutions with Islamic education and culture (Clyne, 2001).

The first Australian Islamic educational school was set up in Melbourne in 1983 (Leithwood & Steinbach, 2002). Today, more than 15,000 students are receiving education at 30 Australian-Islamic institutes around the country (Tolj, 2017). Islamic schools have their own identity and operate parallel to other state schools. However, the Federal and State governments provide sponsorship. Hence, while studying the parent-school relationship in Australian schools, it is necessary that Islamic schools are also included in the research because they are part of the government funding and curriculum. For cultural and ideological coherence and religious affiliation reasons, Muslims are more involved in Islamic schools than non-Islamic ones in order to remain attached to the home culture (Clyne, 2001; Saeed & Akbarzadeh, 2001).

According to some studies, in the Netherlands, Islamic parents make no significant contribution to their child's religious growth in the school setting (Driessen & Merry, 2006; Merry, 2005). This decreased participation can be attributed to the parents' thinking that, their sole obligation towards their children is solely through education, the distance from school to home, and their challenging employment. In America, Muslim parents are very much involved in their children's education and participate in strengthening parent-school relationships (Merry, 2005). This enthusiastic involvement can be a consequence of competition generated by other local immigrants.

Schools could achieve success by employing effective parent-school relationships by means of different approaches. Teachers also serve the role of parents (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006). Students' production is less than their expected production if families are not participating in their learning cultures (Leithwood & Steinbach, 2002). The learner's conduct, school attendance, and the level of academic achievement reflect the level of the parent's engagement in their studies (Leithwood & Steinbach, 2002; Michael, Dittus & Epstein, 2007).

The knowledge and expertise of school activities and programs are also linked with parents' participation (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006).

2.6 Textbooks in education

Religious education in schools largely relies on books and other reading materials. According to Crotty and Crotty (2000), the use of textbooks raises several considerations, including the ones about whose knowledge was to be disseminated in the education process and for which purpose. These questions may apply to religious education and textbooks as well; not because of perceptions about the school, but because of the textbooks' content. This is guided by society's mainstream approved curriculum. A curriculum is a learning structure that is prescribed by somebody's knowledge; it is not neutral knowledge that is spread across the educational context. Culture, politics, economics, and religion affect the way the curriculum is structured and therefore cannot be separated entirely from the socio-cultural context within which a curriculum is developed. Again, Crotty and Crotty (2000) present the argument that, although textbooks present legitimate knowledge to students, the problem is that textbooks are used and determined by teachers with certain views and these personal views are often presented as facts. The textbook is caught in a web of social and ideological relations. However, we still need textbooks, as they play a decisive role in religious education and provide useful resources for students and teachers. On the other hand, the selection of textbooks should constantly be guided by the learner's educational needs and should be updated to keep up with the demands of contemporary educational approaches. For example, a textbook written some 30 years ago may not be current.

Most institutions still make use of the text as a major resource for their teaching elements; however, the presented material may be modified according to the students' needs and abilities, such as preparing worksheets, assessments, and quizzes. Dwyer (2000) argues that any

textbook can have positive and negative attributes, which can lead to its misuse as it can set narrow parameters for teaching and learning. On the other hand, a good textbook can be a powerful resource for any teacher, especially for instructors who are less familiar with course content. Ryan (2000) states that school textbooks include not only an explicit content, but also an implicit content that reflects ideological meanings acquired through reading. The teacher needs to uncover these embedded meanings in school resource materials and judge the message they give to students. On the other hand, the religious study encourages students to practice critical thinking. Inspired by the work of Elliot Eisner (1995), the author emphasises the importance of equipping students with critical reading and thinking through textbooks.

2.6.1 Qualities of a good religious education textbook for Muslim religious education with young children

Islamic religious education textbooks should satisfactorily answer children's questions about Islam. They should help the students understand these textbooks without the help of the teacher on a basic level. These books ought to be relevant to the children in terms of catering for their learning needs. Religious education textbooks should have enough exercises or activities to help children learn and master religious concepts. Religious education textbooks should always be upgraded and updated in order to keep up with the demands of today's educational needs. The examples used in these books should be relevant for Australia today.

Information coverage in the Islamic religious education textbooks should be inclusive of the most appropriate and suitable verses from the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah (hadiths)* and the inner lives of significant individuals highlighted in the book, as these people set the example for the students in their daily lives. The textbooks must also appeal to the targeted age group. Islamic textbooks should be coherent, concise and take children on an educational journey that is thematically sound. This can be achieved by using diagrams, concept maps and/or charts.

In a regular classroom, students are perceived as competent learners who have the capability of grasping the nature of the complex information they will use in the future to clearly comprehend religious past, present and future events. A good textbook that is well written is one that elaborates on the historical, ethical, cultural and scriptural aspects of issues to enhance the development of the children's psychology in this regard (Chelebi, & Engebretson, 2008). The level of language used and the arrangement of information should inspire children to use their logical thinking. A good textbook will also give students an opportunity to take the steps in the current process of development in terms of spiritual scholarship, by use of various methodologies in the textbook, as part of the published information (Habel & Moore, 1982). Another quality of a good textbook is that it is cognizant of diversity. It acknowledges that children are from different backgrounds and their levels of religious commitment vary from unbelief to belief, while others remain in between these states. The book acknowledges different religious cultures present within Australian schools. This implies the textbook does not delve into making generalizations regarding the student, nor does it use a language that is presumptive in nature, assuming that all children have common beliefs and share their faith practice. The language, style and chapters must not alienate children who may not understand Allah from the onset of their educational journey. This implies a good textbook provides relevant information which respects the religious autonomy of the students to interrelate with the textbook material in a way they can personally understand. In as much as it creates this sense of freedom for the children, it simultaneously provokes their intuition and levels up creativity. It gives children the opportunity to reflect on their personal beliefs through the various activities, discussions and examples of prayers to be mastered. By doing so, the textbook engages the students intellectually and personally at reflective levels.

A good religious textbook also furnishes the children with specific information, and should be easy for the children to comprehend (Chelebi, 2008). This enables a textbook to be useful to the teachers who will eventually select the materials that need to be completed in line with the curriculum outline. Various exercises, examination assignments, exchange subjects, update inquiries, and tests all extend student learning (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008).

2.6.2 Islamic and other religious textbooks used in primary schools in Australia

Janson (2016) emphasises that Muslims remain a minority group even though the Australian society has encountered an increased religious diversity recently but calls for inclusion of Islam as a great religion because it contributes to culture. Janson promotes Islamic faith to children by supporting institutionalization of faith through financial and academic facilities and rules governing school systems. These rules are to dictate the manner in which Muslim children are to be supported. Janson incorporates Islamic content and Muslim outlook in the curriculum sections with the aim of developing the interfaith understanding and social relationships.

Janson (2016) goes on to highlight the social aspects of Muslim children who are required to learn and live in harmony with members of other communities. For instance, she mentions the significance of eating together at home as emphasised in the *Qur'an*. "The food of the Jews and Christians is religiously permissible" (Jason, 2016, p. 36). Introduction of Islamic education in schools will enable children to grasp some of the words with loose meaning when translated into English. She goes on to give an example of the term, '*jihad*' which in English translation refers to religious struggle. Within Islam, the term denotes the struggle and the repercussion of dishonoring Allah as the only God. In science, religion remains conspicuous due to the obsolescence of innovations like the production of perfume and soap.

Jones (2012) asserts that the major concern among Muslims in Australia is their children's education. Initially, Muslims in the country were forced to teach their children at home due to the lack of Muslim schools in the nation. Introduction of Islamic schools has led to the concern of what really constitutes 'Islamic Education'. Questions have arisen as to whether separation of Muslim children from the mainstream can also maintain Australian values (Jones, 2012). However, by introducing Islamic education in the school, teachers and academic administrators will learn and incorporate cultural variation and suitable approaches of living in a multi-racial society (Chelebi, 2008).

Parents will also benefit from this education as they desire to have their children educated in schools where Islamic values and practices permeate the school curriculum. Schools will not only observe foods taken by children but also incorporate dress codes for Muslims. Mogra (2013) contends that the essential element in teacher education is the escalating focus on faith and schooling and its comprehension. As a researcher and teacher in a state school, Mogra has had a broad experience in Islamic education due to his background, career life and social life. Through observation and survey of the teachers, Mogra concludes that female teachers in academic institutions are depicted as passive due to their religion, yet they are highly significant in primary schools (2013). The increasing religious institutions that are in need of more Muslim teachers attribute to this. Muslim teachers in Australia and other western countries are disappointed by the negative stereotypes about Muslims, which results in decreased motivation to expose their identity and less role models to children. Moreover, Mogra affirms the need for teachers to remain positive role models for Muslim children as an approach of teaching in primary schools (2013).

Mogra is highly momentous as he draws attention to the significance of primary school Muslim teachers in Australia. He emphasises the reasons for the negative reactions realised

among Muslim teachers such as negative perception related to Islam, which affects the interaction between teachers and students (2013). Other emphases related to the study include the nature of experience. These challenges emerge from little experience, limited number of role models and hence effective guidance and absence of encouragement. Teachers, however, typically embrace the teaching profession with the objective of influencing an inclusive perception of children.

By highlighting more about Muslim teachers and common challenges they encounter, Mogra contributed to the research by outlining challenges teachers encounter at work. The study emphasises this teaching approach as it is paramount to all Muslims since the *Qur'an* dictates that the individual puts constraints on themselves within these margins. Mogra's work is additionally significant as it highlights importance of religious education in schools. Mogra affirms that by teaching Islamic education, the nations will be preparing the future generation by equipping them with skills and knowledge in the religion (2013). This objective is achieved by the image portrayed to children. Muslim teachers are morally appealing to the children, for they promote importance of education and general success in life. With the increasing Muslim population in the nation, children are in need of Islamic education and Muslim teachers. This education will enable them to have successful lives and counter stereotype. A spiritual aspect, therefore, needs to be incorporated in the schools.

Hassim and Cole-Adams (2010) offer essential guidance to Muslim teachers in primary schools. The authors contend that teachers develop future leaders who must be equipped with respect and other values embedded in Islamic teachings. Practical ideas are offered to ensure that teachers continually engage Muslim pupils in an enriched and rewarding approach. The authors emphasise that tolerance and respect are significant values expected from all citizens.

These are instilled in students, especially among the minority communities, so they can embrace these values.

Hassim and Cole-Adams (2010) illustrate how teachers should introduce Islamic education to classroom subjects like mathematics, history, English, science, and across-curricula learning. The reader is guided on how they can attain positive results for Muslim students through identifying and engaging them with the practices and customs. Children are presented with the Islamic teachings and taught how to behave like Muslims. Hassim and Cole-Adams (2011) continue to accentuate their previous edition stating that it is essential to train future citizen's spiritual aspects to guide them socially since the future of a nation is largely formed within the classroom and at schools. Respect, humanity and understanding are among the major values of the country, which can be shared with primary school children through the strategies and techniques applied in religious studies. The study highlights various strategies applied in different schools as a bid to foster intercultural and interreligious consciousness. The objective is to ensure that students are able to live in harmony with major ethnic groups and still appreciate their religious background.

Douglas (2011) notes that most Australian authors have used textbooks to highlight the pertinent issues affecting the Islamic religion. For instance, the case of how women are perceived in the society and the issue of terrorism are among the controversial issues discussed in the literature. Others have used the power of books to highlight the daily challenges a typical Muslim would undergo at their place of work. This is often evident during the job search process where Muslims are expected to meet all the requirements of the job market, including dressing codes. Textbooks have also been used by Australian authors to explore other essential socio-cultural factors, such as legal processes and the various religious dilemmas that Muslim minorities encounter. Books, especially those about Islam written by Western scholars, are often

characterised by cases of bias against Muslim families. Textbook emphasises learning of the Islamic notions and concepts as an essential pillar in integrating Muslims in the Australian environment. Some have used the power of the pen to analyze critically some issues of concern, like the long-term effect of continuous use of English in the mosques.

One can access limitless information and data on the internet on diverse subject areas. In religious education, however, there will always be a fundamental need for quality textbooks, reference books and prescribed supplementary texts. For this very reason, faith-inspired schools, communities and school boards will always be around to “decide” which quality textbooks will best serve the interests of their specific communities. According to Rossiter (2000), the effectiveness of placing good materials in students’ hands is clear to be seen in their learning on religious issues. The materials, especially when they are coupled with the teacher’s inbuilt capability on teaching, will help deliver a rich learning strategy. Rossiter (2000) believes that good resource materials for students usually have the appropriate and creative methods of presentation that are built into the format of the text.

2.6.3. Qualities of a good religious education textbook for Muslim religious education with young children

Textbooks used by teachers to spread the word of God to children should comply to the religious teachings, primarily because individual needs of each and every child should be taken care of. Children aged nine to 12 years of age should know the general requirements and teachings of Islamic religion (Cotter, 2000). The systems and structures in the Muslim faith should align and be suited to the age of an individual, especially the children, in order to enhance their understanding and practice of the religion (Cotter, 2000). Textbooks should also incorporate ethical issues that are relevant to the age group involved in the situation. This

reinforces the language and themes included, which need to be familiar to the group for the endeavor to be successful.

The necessity for students to have a clear understanding of Islamic concepts and general concepts of the Islamic religion is more important nowadays than it was in the past due to the increased Muslim population amid diverse ethnic groupings in the country. This emphasis should thus be incorporated within the educational curriculum to foster harmony and respect within the society with mixed races and cultures. Additionally, the Australian Curriculum (AITSL, 2015) emphasises the freedom of children to spiritual grouping and religious education. In 2008, the Australian government demonstrated its commitment to the importance of promoting Islamic education in the country through a consortium of three different universities – the University of Melbourne, University of Western Sydney and Griffiths University – founded with the aim of promoting the comprehension of Islamic affairs among students (Hassim & Adams, 2007). One of the premises explained in this context includes the utilization of social and cultural norms of the Islamic faith to guide the structuring of books. Australia experiences diversity in religion, this affects liberalization and amalgamation of individual and global context. Children are increasingly aware of diverse languages and religions.

Focusing mainly upon one religion encourages individuals to learn the customs and values of their cultures. Due to change of time and periods, textbooks should be updated from time to time to enhance consistency. Islamic textbooks should be coherent, concise and take children on an educational journey that is thematically sound. This can be achieved by using diagrams, concept maps or charts. The analysis of textbooks in this thesis has been conducted according to these characteristics of a good textbook.

Rossiter (2000) provides explicit details of what are the best features of high quality religious education texts. Firstly, the appearance and production of student texts on religion

must be comparable to other texts in humanities, such as English and geography; otherwise, students will see it as being deficient, and hence negative views on religious education will be reinforced. Additionally, religious education texts must keep up with changes in the format used in other texts. An example of this is that textbooks in other fields have developed their traditional presentation of content from factual and systematic to focusing on analysis, interpretation and critical thinking. Importantly, the content incorporated in religious education books should capture the pertinent issues that impact the understanding of learners. Finally, Rossiter (2000) states that he would prefer to have smaller booklets covering units of work rather than a single thick text with a large amount of content to be covered. Most importantly, he highlights the need to develop internet resources to deliver religious education in today's digital world.

The analysis by Mudge (2000) deals with contemporary understanding as the primary focus of 'relationality' and educational endeavor. He delves into various sources in order to stress the dilemma that religious educators and text writers place emphasis on intellectual decisions. Mudge (2000) talks about the 'aesthetic attitude' and how it has been hindered traditionally by believers. According to him, a choice is required to be made between an objective, distanced approach and an affective approach related to the 'text'. Mudge (2000) argues that an understanding of any text should involve both of these dimensions. As such, when studying the religious text and the challenges it offers, these should be seen as directed to both affective and cognitive aspects of an individual. The heart is critical because it is a sacred space, and contemporary spirituality and educational discourse hold the heart to be a central educational matrix. Mudge (2000) believes that readers need to engage the heart in the pedagogical process and in reading or interpreting religious texts.

Cotter (2000) claims texts should be based on the integration of two essential principles:

- *Tradition:* Respect for the richness and depth of religious tradition, desire and sense of belonging.
- *Experience:* Respect for life experiences and the ideas of young people.

Islam should be taught to the children, for easy comprehension regarding the implication of religion and the role it serves in human life. This approach will enable children to perceive things positively and act as Muslims at all times. This perspective poses a challenge to all textbook writers and teachers. As a religion requiring us to think, observe, inquire, and analyze, Islam poses numerous challenges for children to develop analytical skills. Since Islam is not a religion to be followed blindly, it should be taught consciously using the approach depicted in the *Qur'an*. In addition, children are quite curious and frequently ask questions beginning with, 'why'. Teachers are, therefore, called to positively apply this curiosity as a teaching approach (Al-Atta, 2009).

According to Al-Alawni (2001), Islamic education should not be introduced in isolation, but should be accompanied by other subjects in schools and at home and parental guidance programs. For instance, teachers can incorporate the approach of teaching Islamic education with English literature where Islamic poems and dramas are introduced in class. These learning materials should be structured to suit the level of understanding of the children. Achieving this goal calls for united efforts between teachers and parents. This is to enable the children to continually apply their analytical skills in real life situations. Teachers are called to read intensively to broaden their knowledge and associate it with the Islamic values and children's experience and knowledge. Introduction of this education to primary children will further equip them with profound knowledge on moral obligation as a human being. The *Qur'an* stipulates: "But (since) good and evil cannot be equal, return evil with that which is better, so that the

person between you and whom there was enmity may become like a close friend" (41; 34). More of these teachings can be structured for the children below the age of 10 years because the level of being proactive is very high at this age and it would help in initial mastery of the education.

Children will then be requested to embark on a personal reflection on good and harmful results of their actions. They will thereafter develop stronger faith as reason will support the pillar of Islamic faith. To encourage children to reason, they should be heartened to ask questions. Such practices support strong classroom teachings and Islamic knowledge.

To enhance moral teachings in class, teachers are advised to refer to the true stories of bygone nations given in the *Qur'an* and derived from the teachings of prophet Muhammad and his companions. Teachers usually use fables and stories from academic sources to demonstrate a point. This teaching aid is relevant to children as it is easy to relate with when compared to the abstract principles. Previous studies were conducted to ascertain the reason why some non-Muslims embraced Islam while some Muslims became committed. These studies confirmed that Muslims as well as the public appreciated the moral conduct demonstrated with committed Muslims (Al-Alawni, 2001). Teachers should therefore foster this early in the children through teaching by example and serving as positive role models. Teachers who teach the meaning of the faith tradition must be well-familiarised with it so they are secure in their knowledge of tradition and confident in their skills.

According to Engebretson (2000), high-quality religious education textbooks used in secondary education includes text which:

- explores scriptural, historical, cultural, ethical and liturgical assets by engaging students with comprehensible literature, enlivening higher order thinking, while respecting the student's emotional and intellectual development.

- exposes students to up-to-date developments in theological studies, and that information of these recent studies is used as a specific methodology in the book, or included as cited information in the book.
- recognises diversity of religious commitment and cultures. In doing this, generalizations and prejudices about all students having similar beliefs and faith practices are mediated. The text should not use ‘presumptive’ language as this will isolate learners who do not have a strong connection to religion.
- allows the student to decipher information in their own way while at the same time challenges the learner to be more creative and reflective. Good textbook material provides a platform for reflection through examples of scriptures and prayers, and discussion focuses in the book.
- contains exceedingly explicit information on any given topic, organised into specific components; thus, this becomes a useful resource for the teacher to navigate easily.
- uses various forms of research assignments, revision questions, student activities, and discussion topics that are aimed at helping a student gain more knowledge and employ them creatively.
- is visually attractive, using animation and other illustrations to capture the attention of the child while at the same time remaining relevant. This way, the book educates about religion through contemporary and traditional art.
- acknowledges the significance of information technology and encourages learners to use technology for additional information.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has emphasised the importance of building religious beliefs in children from a young age so that they can practice their religion and know how to converse with God. Parents, teachers and textbooks play an important role in this endeavour. The support and encouragement of parents, devotion of teachers, and authentic and attractive textbooks can help teach children about religion. Several provisions have been made proposed regarding the need to educate children about Islamic faith and beliefs. All these establishments are strengthened when this sort of training happens in the connection of duty to religious flexibility and human rights. These incorporate:

- Islamic faith and beliefs are essential constraints in the lives of people and groups, comprehending these are essential if children are to understand and interact with each other in turn of their differing social orders, and additionally in the event that they are to like the significance of the rights that secure them.
- Learning about Islamic faiths and beliefs help to shape self-understanding and improve it, providing a deeper energy about the children's personal growth in faith. Contemplating Islamic faith and beliefs opens people's mind to inquiries of significant appreciation and get learners to avoid discriminating on the grounds of some moral issues, which is met quite often through the course of history.
- Much of Islamic history, writing and society can easily be misinterpreted without the correct information about Islamic faith. Subsequently, a study about Islamic faith and its tenets and beliefs is a crucial part of an overall adjusted training. Looking into Islamic faith and beliefs structures part of one's own supply of training and widens one's frame of reference and extends one's knowledge into the complexities over a significant time span.

- Knowledge of Islamic faith and beliefs can help push conscious conduct and improve social union. In this sense, all parts of social order, independent of their own feelings, profit from information about religious beliefs.
- Learning about children's perspective informs pedagogical practice.
- Well constructed texts which support teaching and learning.

Beyond being an educational tool, a valuable religious text has the possibility to change a learner's perspective about the world in the religious field. The following chapter explains the methodology used in this research, which adds to the literature discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The study methodology selected is mixed research methods. The method incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Both questionnaires and interviews would be used accordingly. The chapter will provide a review of the research design that was used for gathering the data. It will explain the philosophical basis of the research design. It will additionally define how research was carried out and how the data was analysed. When making the research design the research questions shall be considered so that they could be attuned to the data collection methods. The school in this study caters for students from kindergarten up to year twelve. 42 different ethnic groups of students exist within the institution community, which is a portrayal of the multiethnic society in Australia.

3.1 Research design

The research design methodology encompasses mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative). The main data collection methods will be through questionnaires and interviews. A survey of 60 school-children of age ranging from 9-12 years in a Muslim majority school in Sydney would be used. Approximately 53% of the children who took part in the survey were girls and 47% were boys. Approximately 20% of the schoolchildren were nine years old, 32% were 10 years old, while another 32% of the students were 11 years old and the remaining 17% were 12 years of age. For the interviews, parents were recruited based on whether they identified as devoted Muslims and if they had a child attending the school aged between 9-12 years. Since most of the Muslim parents are working far from Sydney, the study sought to interview 2 parents who could be available and living nearby the school. The number of Muslim teachers in the school was only .three, so the study sought to interview all three of these Muslim teachers.

3.1.1 Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What do Muslim primary school children believe about Allah?
- What questions do Muslim primary school children have about Allah?
- How do Muslim children learn about Allah?
- Which features of teaching materials used to teach Muslim children about Allah most helpful? Why?

In order to answer these questions, this study took into consideration a faith-inspired primary Islamic school in Sydney as a case study. Established in 1996 at the time of the study, the school had a student population of 300. The school follows the educational philosophy of Gülen. The number of teachers stood at 20. More than 42 nationalities were represented within the school demonstrating that the school, like Australia, was multicultural. I worked as a teacher of religious education in the school at the time of the study. Studies involving children and their religion are very sensitive due to the ethical implications involved. One limitation was the complications encountered in getting the children to respond to questions of this study. This was mostly overcome by notifying teachers and parents in advance and seeking their consent for the children to participate in the study. The data were collected over a period of two months in 2013.

There were limited textbooks for analysis. The researcher incorporated the use of scholarly articles and online sources to ensure that the study was comprehensively analysed. The time scale for collecting data was limited due to the complications realised in finding children to participate in the study. To overcome this problem, the researcher had to analyse the collected data simultaneously with the data collection.

The study was limited to children aged between 9 and 12 years of age in primary schools and did not analyse those in secondary schools. Data was limited to only one faith-inspired primary school.

The significance of this study is that the data gathered and findings established will help stakeholders in the policy making process in the educational sector in the future. It will also contribute to the already existing body of knowledge and encourage further research in the area of religious studies teaching.

This study may also assist parents in their understanding of what their children believe and need to know about Allah and how teachers can contribute.

3.1.2 Justification of the research design

This chapter explains the epistemology that underlies the study, as well as the employed theoretical perspective. A mixed methodology was used in this research, whereas the methods selected for the study include documentary analysis, surveys of children and interviews. Content analysis has been used to analyze the data and allow for its interpretation, along with qualitative and quantitative research methods for the purpose of comprehending the range and depth of views linked to research areas. A mixed method design, consisting of qualitative and quantitative paradigms, has been chosen as the most suitable methodology for the study due to the nature of the focus of the study. Figure Two gives a summary of the design that was followed in this research (Crotty, 1998).

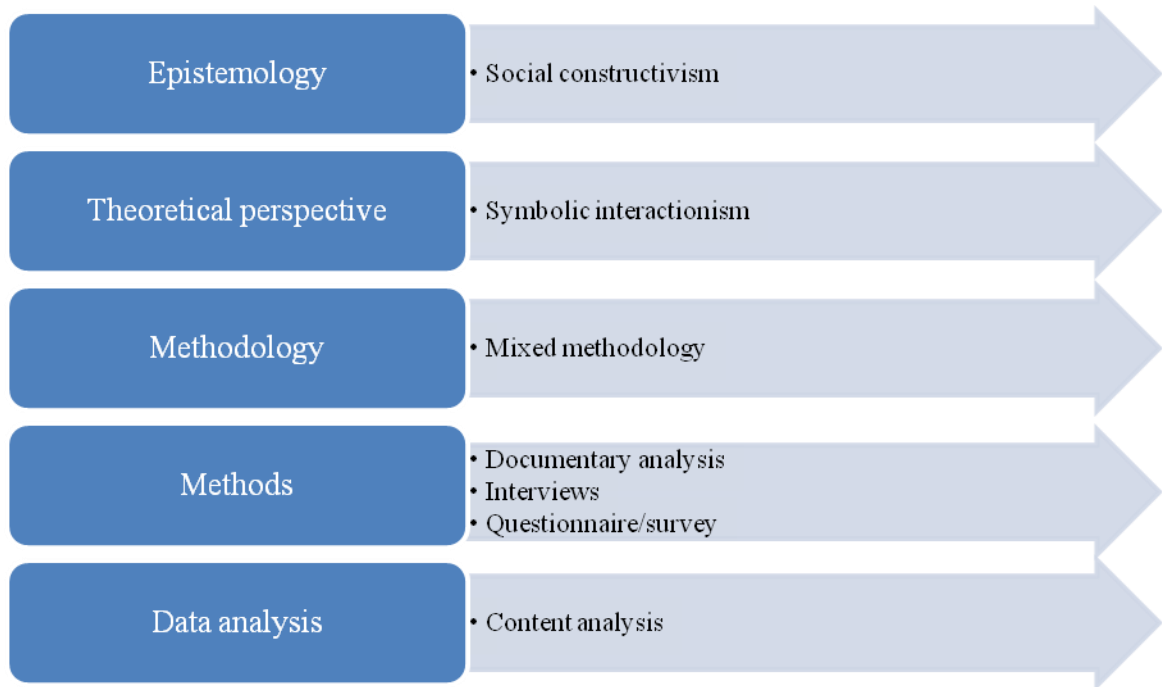


Figure Two. Summary of research design.

3.1.3 Epistemology

Epistemology is about “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) or “the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 201). Crotty describes the need for epistemology as the research of philosophy dealing with how people determine what is true, explaining how adequacy and legitimacy can be established. Studies indicate that the ideal experience is resulting from the positive affirmation statements derived from balanced scientific method (Creswell, 2007).

Social constructivism is another epistemological approach - “According to this approach, individuals seek understanding of the world they work and live and in” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

Further, the author explains that people develop subjective meanings that seem directed to objects based on their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Social relations, culture and historical background play major roles in constructing meaning. Such a phenomenon is attributed the fact that an individual interacts with others through the process of social constructivism (Creswell,

2007). This process of human engagement with objects in the world enables individuals to make sense of the objects in the process.

Social environment and culture play very important roles in the process of developing the behavior of individuals and construction of knowledge. Thus, social constructivism is the epistemology that inspires this study which deals with shared perceptions about Islamic textbooks.

3.1.4 Theoretical position

Symbolic interactionism is a theory within the general epistemological area of constructivism that is important to the interpretations in this study. This theory argues that the 'truth' about a given scenario can be found through analyzing interactions and relationships in the scenario. The theory also argues that truths about certain scenarios can be established through evaluation of the individual or group understanding of the reality. Symbolic interactionism is therefore a theory concerned with spontaneous descriptions that explain social phenomena leading to specific outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The theory gives a rise to the way individuals interpret situations and how various understandings stem from shared interpretations, explaining how individuals and groups interpret experiences and the types of understandings that flow from shared interpretations.

In this way, symbolic interaction is representative of a post-modern approach (Glaser, 2009) with its foci and flexibility. The meanings created in the research interactions provided the descriptions necessary for the interpretation of data. Thus, symbolic interactionism is a suitable theoretical perspective for this research project.

3.2 Methodological Approach

3.2.1 Mixed method

A mixed methods or multi-strategy research design can be understood in terms of its combining of two paradigms into one research: qualitative and quantitative. It includes justified methods, instruments and rationales employed together in a single research study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While carrying out a mixed methods research study, it is significant to gather, analyze and construe the data coming from these two streams into one major stream. It can also spread into several other studies where the same research issue is investigated through different paradigms. In this connection, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie argue that the epistemology of a research study is based on the justified use of induction or discovery of pattern, deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's result) (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 98).

A mixed methods research approach offers a rationalistic and instinctive solution, and can be justifiably used to combine different research paradigms. A growing number of researchers are conducting mixed method research studies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

As already discussed, a mixed methods study design integrates the strong points of the two research traditions, i.e. qualitative and quantitative approaches, and thus, they are appropriately applied in this study. These two paradigms hold strongly justifiable grounds to be independent approaches; however, common scholarly opinion favors combining them for investigation that is more effective.

Yin (2006) states, "The goal of mixed methods research is to draw on the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of both types of research" (p. 345). Principally, it is imperative for the researcher to be cautious enough to distinguish the subtleties of a research design and decide the methods and paradigms upon the major research questions being posited. In addition, if this

Careful, rationalistic thinking leads to the decision that the mixed methods research design would best address the researcher questions, it should be adopted without hesitation. This also includes designing instruments from the two approaches to achieve intended results. Yin (2006) presents further arguments that a mixed methods research design is effective because it is founded on the rational thought patterns that cause human minds to further develop the world and its scholarship. There are instances when research studies cannot be clearly justified in terms of either the research paradigms or the posited research questions leading to a different approach than a pure one-paradigm study. This is rationally a very likely justification for carrying out a study under the mixed methods approach so the strengths of both methods are best used. Yin states it is not fundamental that a mixed methods research study always integrates two methods (2006). In other words, in some cases two different but still quantitative research methods, may be combined, an example of which can be, according to Yin, experimental research method employed with survey research (2006). Yin also points out that this approach can help the researcher accentuate internal and external validity that is not possible if two methods are used in isolation (2006).

Yin further argues that, keeping in view the research aims, quite a few research designs can be formed for different research purposes (2006). Yin also states that today a number of creatively justified research designs are possible, the main point being a clearly justified ground for choosing a certain approach or method. A mixed methods approach allows exploration of a variety of research phenomena, as under this approach there is high scholarly freedom. As already discussed, it is quite convenient to use two approaches in research, building on the strengths of each approach in order to pursue stronger evidence (Yin, 2006). Integrating the qualitative and quantitative methods into a single study rationally offers grounds that are more robust for decision-making purposes.

Another important characteristic of the mixed methods approach is that data collection can be carried out simultaneously, which will benefit the research schedule. Moreover, a mixed methods research study provides other advantages. For instance, narrative accounts can effectively accentuate statistical evidence. A mixed methods research design may also be useful for the aims of triangulation or development, complementarily, initiation and expansion (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). 'Triangulation' is imperative to enhance the cogency and consistency of an examination study. Similarly, complementarity improves a research's interpretability and validity by efficiently coping with the instances of data burdening or overlapping. In this way, it remains keenly focused on the significant areas being explored in a phenomenon.

To achieve scholarly robustness in a research study, a mixed methods approach employs initiation to resolve inconsistencies found in the results coming from qualitative and quantitative methods. In particular, a mixed methods research design augments a study in connection to its vividness, accuracy and depth. This is obvious when interpreting the study conducted on women and meetings carried out by Yin (2006). In its data analysis section, Yin states the underlying assumptions as follows: a research study is more convincing when it employs two research paradigms integrally to add to the present human knowledge. Last of all, dialectical investigators argue that a mixed methods research design is more logical and ethical since a vast array of experiences, voices, standpoints and ways can be effectively explored (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The initial quantitative data in the current study facilitated the qualitative analysis process in the second stage. The approach was adopted to ensure validation of the two data collection methods. The questions for the research relied on a mixed approach of collecting data. The qualitative method was applied in offering deeper insight towards the topic under

investigation whereas the quantitative method was applied to provide a broader context of the research issue under investigation

3.2.2 Distinguishing 'qualitative' and measurable approaches

When an investigator understands well the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind the two methods, it may facilitate the decision whether to employ a quantitative or qualitative approach individually or together. In this regard, Crotty (1998) states that on the basis of the research type - whether qualitative or quantitative - either approach can be enforced. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches comprise different ways, procedures and assumptions for research design. In this context, Wiersma notes that quantitative researchers are more attuned to standardised research procedures and predetermined designs than qualitative researchers (2009). The latter are more flexible once they are into the research and qualitative research involves multiple methods more frequently than quantitative research. Qualitative research is subjective because it mainly deals with social information and its interpretation involves not only the participants but also the researcher.

However, quantitative research revolves more around the principal or ontological assumption of objectivity and so studies are designed; this way, the researcher's, interviewer's and/or observer's influence can be excluded as much as possible (Flick, 2009). It is well established that these two research paradigms bear different ontological grounds conceding different epistemologies. Wiersma argues that qualitative study is suitable when one needs to explain a social setting in a broader context (2009). The survey approach was selected since it facilitates an understanding of the entire setting under investigation. In addition, the methods provided a chance for the researcher to come up with insight into the most crucial aspects that affect human conduct, perception and attitude. The respondents in the anonymous questionnaire were likely to offer more reliable data, thus the results were given validity. Further, the results

from the questionnaires could be interpreted and electronically analyzed to draw better inferences. As argued by Flick, quantitative studies strengthen perceptions regarding relationships, causes and effects (2009).

Subsequently, this research investigation will be carried out to capture the data addressing research goals in natural settings, over an extended period. Creswell affirms that qualitative investigators tend to gather information at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (2007). Creswell (2007) sees the researcher as the focal person in a qualitative study because “qualitative researchers collect data themselves” (p. 657).

This research is concerned with exploring certain aspects of Muslim religious education for primary school children, in particular the beliefs of children related to Allah and the features of teaching material used to educate Muslim children about Allah the Almighty. I have collected the data through interviews of three teachers and two parents, and conducted a survey among primary school students between the ages of 9 and 12 years. I also analysed text books used to support religious education in th school. This study largely employs a quantitative approach using questionnaires for data collection. In addition to the quantitative approach, this study applies a qualitative research approach to understand children’s responses to the survey and help the researcher interpret which features of the teaching materials are most conductive and why.

3.3 Methods

This research is concerned with exploring aspects of Muslim religious education for primary school children. The following four research questions will be addressed in the study:

- What do Muslim primary school children believe about Allah?
- What questions do Muslim primary school children have about Allah?
- How do Muslim children learn about Allah?

- Which features of teaching materials used to teach Muslim children about Allah most helpful? Why?

3.3.1 Questionnaire Surveys of children

The main data collection was through questionnaires that asked the children the following kinds of questions:

- What do you know about Allah?
- How did you come to learn about Allah?
- Are there ambiguous areas in the studies related to Allah?
- Which tools do your teachers employ in teaching about Allah?
- Do you find reading religious books about Allah interesting?

The children completed the questionnaire in less than one hour; the questionnaire was written in appropriate language for their ages. Their teacher introduced the questionnaire, explained the terms the children were not familiar with and assured them that their responses are confidential so they could be honest about them.

Quantitative questions were used to obtain data, which could then be statistically analyzed. Qualitative questions were used to obtain the children's opinions and feelings. The specific questions were chosen to understand what Muslim primary school children knew and how they felt about the religious education they received in relation to Allah, prophets, prayer and the *Qur'an*. The full survey has been given in Appendix A.

3.3.2 Document analysis - textbooks

Document analysis is a social research method that will be employed to collect some of the data for this project. Spradley noted that document research and analysis are the main methods commonly used as they epitomise the case study research strategy (2010). There are a

wide variety of document sources, such as letters, minutes of meetings, public records, private papers, progress reports, newspapers, biographies and presentations; this study reviewed the text-books. Triangulation is a helpful method to examine the validity of data and avoid being misinformed by documentary evidence (Nursi, 1994). The studied documents were not written to provide answers for the research questions, but to serve specific purposes and inform certain audiences. Accordingly, with triangulation skills, it was easy to collect and relate data with the research questions to come up with clear and concise information.

Spradley emphasises that documents are not drawn up to answer research questions, but are part of the evidence base (2010). It is crucial to relate the data collected from document analysis to the research questions. Spradley suggests that relevance comes from weighing, assessing and selecting evidence that has a bearing on the research issues (2010). Reviewing religious education textbooks provided data about the qualities of writing and content that will be most effective in teaching belief in Allah to Muslim children.

Generally, choosing a good textbook is an essential part of teaching. Effectively, teachers make that determination so much that they end up being critical of every book they adopt because they know its weaknesses as well as its strengths. In relation to the content of the required textbooks for teaching children about Allah, each textbook was analyzed in light of the following aspects: The first question that was asked about the textbook was ‘How do teachers use the books to teach about Allah to primary school children?’ The second question sought to know which teaching methods teachers apply in teaching the children about Allah in primary schools and the third question was ‘What significance do the use of text-books have as teaching aids to children in primary schools?’ The fourth question was to find out the disadvantages teachers experienced in teaching children about Allah using textbooks. Other questions were used to derive information that revealed how the book satisfactorily answered children’s

questions concerning Allah. The next question was aimed at knowing if the language used was suitable and easy for children to understand the issue. Moreover, the researcher wanted to know if there were enough exercises or activities in the textbooks to help children learn. Finally, the researcher needed to know if the examples used were relevant to Australia. The study findings confirmed if the textbooks were helpful by providing evidence to support the information collected.

3.3.4 Ethics considerations

Carrying out a research in one's workplace can be very tricky, especially in relation to ethical matters. In research, an individual must not fabricate, falsify or misrepresent research data and must promote truth. Secondly, ethical standards must be followed in order to promote the virtues that are integral in collaborating tasks, in the sense of exercising accountability, trust, and fairness for all as well as mutual respect among all the parties. Ethical expectations in research, such as policies and guidelines pertaining to exclusive rights, author benefits, securing data privacy and sharing are aimed at fostering collaboration and at the same time, protect intellectual property interests.

At the onset of the research, I spoke to school management regarding my intentions and authority was granted, though with limitations. An information letter was sent to the Principal (Appendix F and formal written consent for conducting the research on the school site (Appendix G). Along the way, it was difficult to separate between the information gathered for the research and the information gathered in the line of duty. Being a member of staff, I am privy to data that could make my research more credible and stronger though it would be unethical to use it because it would be in violation of confidentiality. Maintaining confidentiality of the information that I access in my line of duty comes with integrity on my part.

Remaining objective and avoiding bias is challenging, because a researcher is always inclined towards the direction they believe the study should take. Therefore, there is a danger that any data and information that does not support their point of view can be deemed "inappropriate". In research, all data collected from sample groups is crucial and should not be eliminated in case they contradict the beliefs of the researcher.

When carrying out research in a familiar setting like a place of work, protection of human subjects proves difficult, especially when there is a hierarchy involved. To avoid potential issues of coercion, I had to find new ways to ease the participation of the children. To avoid these issues as much as possible, I always spoke to them beforehand and reminded them they were not under any obligation to talk to me. I assured them that I was not forcing them to talk, and if they felt uncomfortable about anything, they could inform me and stop.

Consideration of the above issues formed part of an ethics application submitted to Australian Catholic University, which was approved, and participants were advised of this in the information letters supplied to parents, teachers, and the principal with the statement: "The Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University has approved this study" (see Appendices B, D and F). Informed consent was gained through signed consent forms (see Appendices C, E and G).

3.3.5 Interviews

An interview is a dialogue that has an arrangement and a determination. It goes beyond the impulsive interchange of views in everyday discussions, and becomes a careful interview and tactic with the drive of obtaining thoroughly verified information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). An interview is a method that is widely used by social workers, counsellors, medical staff, marketing staff, politicians, researchers and many others. Although only interviewer and respondent are present in most interviews, it can be used together with recording devices.

Respondents may not be ready to answer all the questions or may not answer the questions accurately all the time, but the interview gives the researcher an idea about their understanding, absorption and interest in of the topics that have been raised. Although interviews are often classified as either structured or unstructured, the fact is that all interviews have a structure of some kind (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A well-planned structure is needed for the success of all interviews; it gives a framework for the interviewer to control and run the interview smoothly. The variables, which contribute to structure, relate mainly to characteristics of the interview schedule.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) assert that the content of the interview is what the questions are about. Questions are the vital part of interview; thus, they should be well constructed, clearly phrased, should not reveal the interviewer's personal views and should incite answers from the respondent. The wording of the questions should be carefully developed and the questions should be in logical order. Kvale and Brinkmann further recommend that, since an interview takes place within a temporal framework, all interviews should be conducted through a certain temporal order whether they are highly structured or informal (2009).

The questions should be arranged according to the three stages of the interview: opening the interview; developing the interview; and conclusion of the interview. The question format should be planned and, in most cases, the question format is either open ended or provides multiple choices. Carlson emphasised that the format refers to the form in which the questions and responses are expressed (2005).

Question format will naturally shape response format. Carlson stressed that, for research interviewing particularly, the question format should allow for a range of possibilities to be given in the response (2005). To conclude the interview structure, the researcher should decide the methods of analysis without waiting until the interview is completed. Kvale and Brinkmann

(2009) emphasised that dialogue is already preliminarily analysed before the end of the interview, as indicated by the researcher's decision to turn off the recorder.

The investigator should uphold impartiality and ensure the cogency of the collected information throughout the dialogues. Kvale and Brinkmann believed that, in principle, a well-crafted interview could be an objective research method in the sense of being unbiased (2009). There are tests and tactics available to check the validity of data such as triangulation, weighting the evidence and receiving feedback from informants. Miles and Huberman (1994) affirm that there are insufficient relevant guidelines and tools to facilitate decision making that ensures the validity of qualitative studies.

The interviewer should manage the interview situation, which includes preparing recording equipment, planning how to protect and store the recorded data, and choosing a suitable physical environment. According to Carlson, the environment should make communication easy and the participants feel comfortable and able to interact (2005). The interviewer should inform the participants about the length of the dialogue and the time should be allocated according to the participant's availability. Interpersonal relations, personal appearance and gestures also contribute to the value of interviews.

Certain skills are required for successful interviewing; Kvale and Brinkmann noted that, when the researcher becomes the main research instrument, their competence and artisanship of the skills, sensitivity and knowledge become essential to the quality of the knowledge produced (2009). Consequently, preparing the interviewer is essential to promote good interrogating expertise. Speaking skills are vital for an interviewer, and Carlson suggests that the interviewer must be able to convey the questions in a way that the respondent can hear, understand and respond easily (2005). Listening is different from hearing, so the interviewer should go beyond the surface meaning to interpret the respondent's intention. Carlson emphasised that the

interviewer has to listen carefully both to what is being said and to how it is said (2005). The interviewer must make “listening” an active behavior, not a passive state. The interviewer must comprehend what has been said and recall details as necessary. The focus is on the interviewer to understand, rather than on the respondent to express themselves clearly (Carlson, 2005). In this study, interviews with teachers and parents will allow the researcher to collect data about their personal experiences and thoughts; this will allow the researcher to gain evidence about what features of teaching materials that are used to teach Muslim children about Allah are most helpful.

3.3.5.1 Interviews with Parents

Parents have some impact on their children’s growth and ways of thinking; they transfer social acquaintance to their children. Children of immigrants seek to form a sense of cultural identity that is defined by their personal experience mixed with their cultural understanding as well as the knowledge derive from their guardians and parents. In this study, two parents were present for the interviews. The method of selecting the parents was that they had a student enrolled at the participating school. Additionally, they needed to have an understanding of the Muslim beliefs and traditions. The invitation letter for these parents is provided in Appendix B. This document was sent to the parents as a sign of invitation to participate in the interview. A consent form (Appendix C) was signed by the parents who agreed to take part in the interview. It took 1.5 hours to interview each parent and the main points of the interview revolved around the impact of religious education on the child’s development (Ryan, 2000). The interview was structured with a sequence of opening questions, the developing questions and the conclusion questions. Most of these questions were aimed at better understanding of the perception of every parent on the study topic. Tape recording of the interview supported further analysis and coding.

3.3.5.2 Interviews with teachers

Data was collected through interviews with three teachers who teach religious education at the institution. The researcher interviewed the three religious education teachers for their perception or opinion concerning the sources used for teaching children about Allah. The dialogue focused on the sources' content and how they are structured to meet the expectations of teachers of the Muslim faith. The selection criteria included experience teaching in the Muslim religion and also a general teaching experience of at least 4 years. Appendices D and F contain the information letters sent to the teachers and the principal regarding the research. The consent forms are provided in Appendix E for teachers and Appendix G for the principal. An unstructured approach to interview was undertaken with the participants. The interview took an average of 1.5 hours per person. Most of the prompting questions that were asked to the respondents were geared towards understanding how they perceived the Muslim religion impacted on child development in the schooling environment. The interview was tape recorded to support further analysis and interpretation.

3.4 Content analysis

Content examination is the inspection of configurations in information and thoughts that help clarify why those arrangements were there in the first place (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). It is a tool for identifying patterns in data and interpreting these patterns to answer the research questions. Bernard and Ryan assert that, although analysis may start before the beginning of a research project, one cannot begin systematic analysis until there is a corpus of data to study (2010). Thus, an investigator starts with gathering qualitative information and then processes it through investigative measures into a clear, comprehensible, perceptive, dependable and unique scrutiny (Gibbs, 2007).

Content examination is any procedure for creating implications by classifying it empirically and steadily (Franzosi, 2004). It is a research tool to study the text or sets of text, such as books, essays, interviews, discussions, newspapers, historical documents, speeches and conversations. This is achieved by counting and measuring various characteristics of its content. Since content analysis is concerned with finding meaning in the text, it is currently used in a vast variety of fields, such as marketing, media, ethnography and cultural studies, sociology and psychology. Franzosi (2004) believes that the strength of content analysis is in processing large volumes of qualitative data. Consequently, Bernard and Ryan (2010) suggest these methods are used across the social sciences and the humanities to explore explicit and covert meaning in text, which is also called manifest and latent content, and for testing hypotheses about texts.

According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), when conducting content analysis, the researcher should go through seven main stages. From the outset, the researcher formulates the research questions, based on repeating themes in previous studies as well as existing theories backed by relevant literature. In effect, the investigator should come up with a combination of variables as well as themes backed by the questions of research. Besides, the researcher ought to conduct a prior testing of the variables for the sampled texts. Additionally, the researcher addresses the underlying problems to facilitate consistency in the coding approach. Ultimately, the variables are applied to the overall text. Indeed, the sixth phase facilitates the creation of a case based variable medium that is built around the resulting variables. The final step reminds the researcher to analyze the matrix using an appropriate level of analysis.

On the other hand, identifying research questions is the first step in most research methods. Collecting the related data is the next step, with interview recordings and field notes to be transcribed. It is necessary to transcribe all collected information in order to analyze it (Gibbs, 2007). Essentially, the collected data related to the research questions need to be divided

into a number of units and categories. Sampling and summarizing the data into groups is important to be able to compare the data easily. Franzosi (2004) suggested that, rather than working with all the possible sources and documents, the research should sample an appropriate number of sources and documents. In essence, Gibbs reveals that coding is the manner in which the definition given to the data in a research is employed to achieve the desired meaning (2007). Thus, 'coding' is a way of tabling or classifying writing in order to create a structure of 'thematic' ideas (Gibbs, 2007). Coding is required to decrease the information into an adaptable mass. Furthermore, in content analysis, every characteristic of interest is normally formalised as coding classification (Franzosi, 2004). These codes may be initially applied to a small amount of text before applying them to entire text to fix any problems related to the codes and the coding. Franzosi noted that pre-testing of the coding scheme and the input material sampled is central to a successful research outcome (2004). By presenting the findings on a matrix, the data is ready for analysis.

Content analysis was used to analyze all the collected data in this research project. The purpose of this study was to collect the data to answer two questions: what do a group of Muslim primary school children believe about Allah and what features of teaching materials used to teach Muslim children about Allah were most helpful, by citing examples and reasons or evidence of the same views. To achieve the scope of this study, several interviews with students and some teachers were used. After every interview, details were analyzed by applying quantitative and qualitative methods to find the underlying cause of collected data. This allowed correct and appropriate analysis to ensure relevance of findings about research questions, which guided the research process.

The information gathered in this learning process was scrutinised in order to explore the study questions, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The methods of analysis used in the study are outlined below.

3.4.1 Quantitative data analysis

In the first phase, the feedback obtained from the respondents and presented in Excel work sheet was examined. As an example of quantitative analysis, the total number of children was divided by age groups and a percentage for each age group was calculated. The children were further divided into how many boys and girls participated in each age group and their percentages calculated (see Table 1 in Chapter Four). For instance, 15% of the survey participants were 10-year-old boys, and 6.6% of survey participants were 12-year-old girls. From the calculations, it was found that 46.6% of participants were boys and 53.4% were girls. These strategies were applied to the creation of many quantitative tables in Chapter Four.

3.4.2 Qualitative data analysis

The goal of qualitative data is to facilitate understanding of the viewpoint of the participants in a more pronounced way than an approach based on statistics and data. Qualitative data is highly descriptive in nature, at the same time portraying the link between the research variables without dependence on statistics. According to Patton (1990), the context of the theme initiated analysis as provided in qualitative research, offers the researcher the context to evaluate the data in close range. In effect, the researcher is therefore able to track and uncover patterns and over-arching themes that tell a story. Every interview session yielded notes that were analyzed carefully before being compiled into a comprehensive report for documenting.

Thus, qualitative data from the children was analyzed; the process started by reading the answers of questions in free form, which paved the way for finding common ideas among students. In essence, the most common answers to each question were sought for making

assumptions. For instance, one of the reviewing questions used was: ‘what do most of the children think about this question?’ To analyze the answers well, the researcher had considered the children’s perspectives. This allowed the researcher to understand what the children thought and at the same time determine why they thought that. This also made it possible to generate various answers for the researcher while basing them on the answers given in the questionnaires.

Whereas the responses of the quantitative responses were directly entered for analysis, the responses from the qualitative approach underwent a coding process so that the interpretation of the data could be less complex. As affirmed by Patton (1990), the data from the questionnaires were conventionally analyzed by identifying the recurrent themes.

3.5 Conclusion

This study aims to further understand religious education for Muslim primary school children. Therefore, it focused on identifying children’s beliefs about Allah and the potential of religious education books that are most effective in teaching belief in Allah to Muslim children. To achieve its set objectives or purpose, various methodologies were employed, including mixed research approaches, as well as qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For instance, this study realised that quantitative research revolves more around the principal or ontological assumption of objectivity and, thus, studies are designed in such a way that the researcher’s as well as interviewer’s or observer’s influences can be excluded as much as possible. Accordingly, a mixed methods research approach offers a rational, inherent explanation and can be justifiably used to employ two different research paradigms in one study. Qualitative research mainly deals with social information and its interpretation involves not only the participants but also the researcher.

The study also discussed methods used; questionnaire, document analysis and interviews. The information gathered in this learning process was scrutinised using content

analysis to explore the research questions as the method of data analysis. Primarily, the research employed quantitative data analysis and later used qualitative data analysis to investigate more deeply. The quantitative data is presented through statistics, such as percentages. The various methodologies were employed to understand children's beliefs about Allah in Muslim primary schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: SURVEY ANALYSIS

This chapter shares the findings from two forms of survey. Firstly, a substantive questionnaire was completed by children. Secondly, parents and teachers were surveyed through interviews.

4.1 Questionnaire respondents

This survey questionnaire was conducted to determine Australian Muslim children's understanding of Allah. The survey engaged 60 Muslim school-children of age ranging from 9-12 years in a school in Sydney, that has a good number of Muslim students. Approximately 20% of the schoolchildren were 9 years old, 32% were 10 years old, 32% of the students were 11 yearsold, whereas the remaining 17% were 12 years old. Approximately 53% of the children who took part in the survey were girls and 47% were boys (see Table 1).

Table 1

Children Participating in the Study by Age and Gender

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | |
|------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| Number | 6 | 6 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 12 | 6 | 4 | 28 | 32 |
| Percentage | 10 | 10 | 15 | 16.7 | 11.7 | 20 | 10 | 6.6 | 46.6 | 53.4 |
| Total | 12 | | 19 | | 19 | | 10 | | 60 | |
| Percentage | 20 | | 31.7 | | 31.7 | | 16.6 | | 100% | |

4.2 Questionnaire design

The survey was a structured questionnaire for the students to fill in their responses. The questions covered various issues ranging from children's understanding of Allah to their own personal beliefs and opinions about Allah. The questions also gauged the role of parents and friends in enhancing the Muslim religion and instilling the teachings of Allah (see Appendix A for the full questionnaire). The range of survey questions explored diverse areas of the Muslim

religion and each question was significant to the context and purpose of the survey. In this section, I will analyze the reasons and importance of the questions used in this survey.

4.2.1 Q1: Do you believe in the existence and oneness of Allah?

This question was included because Islam is founded on the belief that there is only one God; pure monotheism is a fundamental belief for all Muslims. This question was formulated to determine whether the children were conversant with this very significant theological doctrine. This question also gauged the knowledge of the children about the *Qur'an*, which continuously refers to Allah as “the One and only Deity”. Children reflected that they put their trust in One God who they believed to be strong. This question gauged the children’s understanding of the nature of Allah since it has a significant impact on their duties to Allah. It also evaluated the ability of children to understand some of the attributes of Allah and their realization of His supremacy. The answers echoe the words of Al-Ghazali as outlined in one of his articles (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

4.2.2 Q2: Explain your answer to question one.

An explanation to the first question was formulated to determine the foundation from which children based their response about the existence and oneness of Allah. The question was broken down into various options to confine the children’s responses and assist them in providing an answer. This question was designed to supplement the response of the first question and gauge the children’s understanding of Allah. Based on their choice, the child’s response could portray whether they had a deeper understanding of the Muslim faith or whether their decision was based on religious knowledge. For instance, the children who would tick the explanations that “Allah is the Creator” or “Allah is the only One” indicated a deeper understanding of the Divine attributes given in the *Qur'an* (Al-Ghazali, 2004). Conversely, those who would tick the justification that “Allah has no parents” or “forget about Allah”

portrayed more limited understanding. This question is significant in determining the children's seriousness about their faith and their view of Allah (Al-Ghazali, 2004).

4.2.3 Q3: Do you talk about Allah with your parents and friends?

This question sought to determine whether the Islamic teachings were popularly discussed in the Muslim community and especially among friends and parents since parents are the important role models and the Islamic faith is full of divine lessons on recommended ways to bring up children with good role models (Anderson, 2006). This makes it a requirement upon parents to be good Muslims so their children will make efforts to emulate them. Therefore, this question sought to determine whether the parents took Muslim teachings seriously, which is reflected in the children's response. This question determined whether parents taught their children the importance of worshipping Allah as this is the primary message of Prophet Muhammad and the key to achieving proximity to Allah. It is advisable for children to accompany adults, particularly when attending Islamic classes (Anderson, 2006). Therefore, the main objective of the question was to determine whether there was any conversation about Allah between parents, relatives, friends and children.

4.2.4 Q4: If you talk about Allah, write one sentence that you talk about.

This question sought to enhance and support the previous question about children's discussions about Allah with their parents and friends. The question focused on information about what they discussed about Allah specifically. In the recent past, it has been exceedingly challenging to ensure that children are exposed to the recommended Islamic upbringing, considering the significant impact of the media and the family social setting in the way they influence children (Anderson, 2006). Muslims believe it is the responsibility of parents and adult peers who engage with these children to instill positive moral values in them. It is impracticable to protect children from all the harmful forces that can affect their minds and,

eventually, their manners. However, good examples and discussions with parents can set children on the proper direction, which is to abide by the instructions of Allah and His Messenger (Anderson, 2006).

4.2.5 Q5: When you hear about prayer, fasting, going to mosque, Allah, the Prophet, heaven and hell, do you feel an interest in learning about them?

Asking young children about their interest in learning about prayer, fasting and going to mosque was a very important question to determine their attitude about these teachings. It sought to understand whether Muslim teachings were imposed onto children by their parents and community involuntarily or whether the children had a genuine self-interest in learning the teachings. The responses to this question would serve to understand the attitude of Muslim children towards various fundamental aspects in Islam, such as the Prophet, fasting, heaven and hell (Anderson, 2006). The responses were separately analyzed in relation to whether they were from girls or boys to determine whether there was more interest within one gender and why.

4.2.6 Q6: How important is belief in Allah?

The question about the importance of believing in Allah was designed for the children to gauge the extent to which they believed in the supremacy of Allah. The question was a way of analyzing their understanding of Islamic teachings, which continually emphasise the need to believe in Allah in order to have a meaningful life. Failure to believe in religion makes our lives rotate around physical or material enjoyments and consequently become spiritually fruitless. The responses the children gave to this question assisted in determining their seriousness about Allah and their perception of Islamic teachings. These responses were also considerable pointers towards the knowledge and understanding instilled in the children about Allah and religious teachings by the people close to them (Ay, 2007).

4.2.7 Q7: Do you want to read the *Qur'an*, learn *dua* and pray five times a day?

This question gauged the children's interest in reading the *Qur'an* and praying. Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam and a requirement for all Muslims. Prayer, according to the *Qur'an*, is a Muslim's personal communion with Allah and is the basis of faith. This question assessed children's awareness on the importance of a Muslim reading the *Qur'an* and praying. Understanding the *Qur'an* and fasting are opportunities for a Muslim to communicate to Allah anything they feel and need. This question assisted in evaluating the feelings and attitudes of children about praying to Allah five times a day and frequent reading of the *Qur'an* (Anderson, 2006).

4.2.8 Q8: When you were small you could not walk, but Allah created you in such a way that you can walk. When you grow older you can start to walk. In the same way, Allah created us with belief in Him even before we start believing in Him when we are younger. Therefore, when we get older we can find this belief of Allah inside us and believe in him. What do you think of this idea?

This question, though long, attempted to get the children's response to whether people are created with the belief in Allah within them or whether belief is instilled by teachings. The question sought to obtain understanding about the origin of belief in Allah in young children. Noting the differences among age groups, the largest increase in belief in Allah most frequently happens among older people (Anderson, 2006). Asking such a question to children is a good way of determining their deeper understanding about Allah and what motivates these children to have a strong confidence in His existence, even without seeing Him. This assisted me to analyze the children's thoughts about whether they were born believing in Allah or whether they were taught to believe in Him after they were born.

4.2.9 Q9: If you did not hear anything or were not taught anything about Allah, would you believe that Supreme Being existed and would you search for Him?

This question sought to gain a deeper understanding of the children's commitment to Allah, by enquiring whether they would still trust and be eager to learn about Him if nobody had ever told them about His existence. This question was formulated to test the children's faith in a divine being unseen and to test their commitment to Islam even without the involvement of parents and religion. Trust is one thing that makes us believe in Allah even when we have never seen or heard of Him. The question sought to stress the teachings of Prophet Muhammad that no one has ever seen Allah, but we are able to make some form of contact with Him. This question examined the trust that young children had in things that they had not seen or heard, and how far they would retain that trust if no one intervened in their lives (Ay, 2007).

4.2.10 Q10 Does everyone need Allah?

This question assessed the children's understanding about the significance of Allah in everyone's life. Muslims believe Allah created human beings principally in order that they may identify their Maker through His mighty works. This question assessed the understanding of children about the freedom given to human beings by Allah to choose between right and wrong. Comprehending the character of God is vital to children, since it has considerable impact on a Muslim's responsibilities towards Allah. This question is significant to this survey because it assisted in determining the children's understanding about the independence of Allah as the Creator of all things and the Giver of Life (Ay, 2007).

4.2.11 Q11: Where do you think Allah is?

Question 11 sought to find how the children understood Muslim belief about the residence of Allah. Various options were given to the children about the widely-specified areas where Allah could be residing, such as everywhere, in heaven, the sky and our hearts. Based on

the numerous arguments about the residence of Allah among various religions of the world, this question was posed to assess children's understanding about Allah from their opinion and Islamic teachings. This question sought the children's capability to make important decisions about Allah and their reliance on religious teachings to make personal decisions. This emphasis on personal decision-making is outlined by the Victorian Board of Studies (Anderson, 2006) and observation by Ay, who found out that children believed that Allah is the all-powerful (2007).

4.2.12 Q12: Does the beauty of nature help you to understand the presence of Allah?

Question 12 attempted to get the children's view about God after seeing everything that is in the universe. It also sought to gain their understanding about their role and responsibility in the universe. This question was essential in determining what comes to the minds of children when they see the beauty of the universe: do they view the beauty of the universe as a gift from Allah, or just a mere wonder of the world?

4.2.13 Q13: If things do not go the way you want in life, do you get angry with Allah and ask why things are not going right for you?

Question 13 sought to get the children's opinion regarding their attitude to Allah based on bad or good happenings in their daily lives. By asking about their feelings and attitudes regarding occurrences in their daily lives, this question served to assess their degree of spiritual development and understanding of Islamic doctrines (Ay, 2007).

4.3 Children's responses and their connection to the stages of faith

4.3.1 Belief in the Oneness of Allah

58 out of the 60 student participants emphasised their belief in the existence and oneness of Allah. This was in line with Fowler's research, which concluded that children at this stage develop the means of dealing with the world and making sense. All the children emphasised their belief in the existence and oneness of Allah. The children can use this to criticise and

evaluate the previous stage of fantasy and imagination. However, in this survey no child, regardless of age, disputed the fact about the existence and oneness of God (see Table 2).

Table 2

Belief in Oneness of Allah

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| All the time | 6 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 12 | 6 | 4 | 27 | 31 | 58 |
| % | 10 | 10 | 13.3 | 15 | 11.7 | 20 | 10 | 6.6 | 45 | 51.6 | 96.6% |
| Most of the time | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 3.4% |
| Sometimes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% |
| Never | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% |

4.3.2 Reasons for belief/disbelief

When asked about their reasons for believing in the oneness of Allah, 52% of the children justified their answers by stating that Allah is the Creator of everything and He is the one and only God. However, 48% of the children did not have reasonable reasons why they believed in the oneness of Allah. Most of the 48% never responded on the reasons why they believed in the oneness of Allah. This meant that 48% of the children lacked enough knowledge about Allah. The fact that several students also stated that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah aligns with Fowler's synthetic-conventional stage that children up to the age of 12 years tend to base their values and beliefs more on the ideologies and judgments of authoritative figures. The authoritative figures in this respect are Allah, and also parents,

teachers and adults in different capacities (Ratcliff, 2008). When asked about their reasons for believing in the oneness of Allah, 52% of the children justified their answers by stating that Allah was the Creator of everything and He was the one and only God. The fact that several students also stated that Muhammad was the Messenger of Allah aligns with Fowler's (1981) synthetic-conventional stage that children up to the age of 12 years tend to base their values and beliefs more on the ideologies and judgments of authoritative individuals. The authoritative individuals in this respect are Allah, parents, teachers and adults in different capacities (Ratcliff, 2008a). In this case, most of the children of this age emphasised that Muhammad being Allah's Messenger was an indication of their belief in him as an authoritative person in the Muslim faith.

4.3.3 Talking about Allah with parents and friends and what they discuss about Him

According to Muslim belief, it is imperative for parents to teach their children about Allah and His teachings. This can be done by teaching them small things like giving Him thanks every time they receive something by saying *Alhamdulillah* (Praise to God). According to Fowler (1981), children over the age of 12 years are considered to be at the synthetic-conventional stage where the peer group becomes more important than the family and religious groups. Children at this age believe their friends more than they believe others. This was evidenced in the answers of the children when asked whether they discussed Allah with parents and friends and approximately 98% gave an affirmative response. Only one child aged 10 years responded negatively to this question. The responses also evidenced the enormous role that parents play in educating children about Allah and Islamic teachings.

Table 3 indicates the reality of Fowler's second stage, mythic-literal faith, which states that children aged between 7 and 9 years are fascinated by the oneness of the Creator. They are inquisitive about several attributes of their Creator such as His size, where and how He came

about, and why there was only one and not any other. They were highly concerned with how they needed to understand their Creator. The ‘Other Attributes’ of Allah, recognised by the children, included being loving, helpful, all-seeing, and all-knowing. In addition, children aged between 6 and 2 years also considered their Creator as the One who was the mightiest, most powerful Creator of everything, the One who oversaw everything, the Creator of all humans, defender, sustainer, and giver of all (Fowler, 1981).

Table 3

Understanding the Qualities of Allah

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|------------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| Greatness and power of Allah | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| % | 5 | 6.6 | 5 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 0 | 1.7 | 13.3 | 13.3 | 26.6% |
| Allah as a creator | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| % | 3.3 | 0 | 0 | 3.3 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 16.6% |
| Other attributes of Allah | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 3.3 | 5 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 16.6% |
| Prophets and angels of Allah | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 0 | 3.4 | 0 | 0 | 3.3 | 6.7 | 10% |
| Islam | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 5% |
| The oneness of Allah | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |
| Other answer | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| % | 1.7 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 0 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 13.4% |
| No answer | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1.7 | 6.7% |

4.3.4 Interest in knowledge of God

All the children agreed they had an interest in learning about Allah, the obligatory prayers, fasting and other aspects of Islam. Although some stated this interest emerged sometimes, Table 4 illustrates 85% of the children indicated they had a genuine interest in learning more about Allah (60% all of the time, and 25% most of the time). The fact that only a single girl indicated a lack of interest in learning about Allah strengthens Fowler's argument that children between 6 and 12 years of age want to identify themselves with the stories and beliefs of their religion (Fowler, 1981). The mythical-literal faith makes children within this age group desire learning about the teachings of *Qur'an*, fasting and praying in order to feel part of the Islamic community.

Table 4

Interest in Knowledge of God

| Gender | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
|------------------|------|-------|--------------|
| All the time | 18 | 18 | 36 |
| % | 30 | 30 | 60% |
| Most of the time | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| % | 15 | 10 | 25% |
| Sometimes | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| % | 1.7 | 11.6 | 13.3% |
| Never | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |

4.3.5 Importance of belief

When asked whether belief in God is important, Table 5 indicates that over 98% of the children acknowledged that this was very important. As Fowler (1981) argues, children aged between nine and twelve years are typically more concerned in the oneness of the Creator. In addition, children at this age also view their Creator as the one who is the mightiest, greatest, the Maker of everything, the One who oversees everything, the Creator of all humans, protector,

sustainer, and provider of all (Gurr, 2010). The understanding of their Creator is apparent at this stage. The fact that only one child indicated his doubts in believing Allah shows that children at this stage of their development understand the existence of Allah and believe in Him. Fowler's mythic-literal stage identifies this stage as very critical to the development of a child's faith in God – it is when they start to accept and identify themselves with the stories and beliefs of their community. Parents and religious leaders should ensure that children at this stage are given appropriate religious teachings and knowledge about Allah (Gurr, 2010).

Table 5

Significance of Belief

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|--------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| Very | 6 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 7 | 12 | 6 | 4 | 27 | 32 | 59 |
| % | 10 | 10 | 13.3 | 16.7 | 11.7 | 20 | 10 | 6.6 | 45 | 53.3 | 98.3% |
| Not very | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% |
| I don't know | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 1.7% |

4.3.6 Interest in praying and reading the *Qur'an*

When asked how often they read the *Qur'an* and did the obligatory prayers, over 85% of the children stated they read and prayed often. Table 6 indicates a balance between girls and boys in terms of their responses to the question. The results indicate that both genders are quite conversant with the *Qur'an* and the obligatory prayers of Islam. However, many boys have shown more commitment than girls. This is evidenced in Table 6 by the fact that seven girls stated their inconsistency in reading the *Qur'an* and one girl stated her absolute lack of interest. This is a challenge to parents and religious leaders that adherence to religion and the teachings

of Allah are meant for everybody regardless of gender. Both genders should be treated equally in matters concerning religion (Graham, Walton & Ward, 2005).

Table 6

Interest in Praying and Reading the Qur'an

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| All the time | 6 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 18 | 18 | 36 |
| % | 10 | 10 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 8.3 | 10 | 5 | 3.3 | 30 | 30 | 60% |
| Most of the time | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 8.4 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 6.6 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 15 | 10 | 25% |
| Sometimes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6.6 | 0 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 11.6 | 13.3% |
| Never | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |

4.3.7 Are people created with the belief in Allah?

Just over 78% of children strongly endorsed the idea that belief in Allah is inborn and 85% of the overall respondents agreed with the statement (see Table 7). Elkind (1978) argued that the concept of belief in Allah being inborn is well evidenced by his first stage of faith. At this stage, Elkind argues that children between the ages of five and seven years have a similar form of thinking, comprehension and approach and thus the impressions pertaining to religious uniqueness for these children is the same (Graham et al., 2005). It is the notions that are instilled in them afterwards that shape and guide their belief in Allah.

Table 7

Inborn belief

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|---------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| I agree very much | 4 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 23 | 24 | 47 |
| % | 6.6 | 10 | 11.7 | 11.7 | 10 | 15 | 10 | 3.3 | 38.3 | 40 | 78.3% |
| I agree | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| % | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 1.6 | 0 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 6.6 | 8.3% |
| I don't know what I think | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| % | 1.7 | 0 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6.7 | 3.3 | 10% |
| I don't agree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |
| No answer | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |

4.3.8 Pursuing and being committed to Allah

Slightly over 57% of the children stated they would still make efforts to read and believe in Allah even when they did not know anything about Him (see Table 8). It is also worth noting the response by 42% of the respondents who stated that they were not sure or did not think they would believe in Allah if they were not taught about Him. The number of children who responded positively to this question was especially high between the ages of 10 and 12. This supports the research findings of Elkind's third stage of faith indicating that children within this

age group extended their thinking further in terms of religious faith since they began to engage in higher level thinking about different religious groups (Spry & Graham, 2009). During this period, children begin to understand differences between their belief, ways of worship and other religions, which makes them respond the way they do. However, the fact that 32% of children, with almost all of them aged 10 to 12 years, indicated their doubts in believing in an unknown God poses a serious challenge (Spry & Graham, 2009).

Table 8

Commitment to Allah

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|----------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| Yes definitely | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 14 | 9 | 23 |
| % | 6.7 | 3.4 | 8.3 | 5 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 5 | 3.3 | 23.3 | 15 | 38.3% |
| Yes | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 11 |
| % | 3.4 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 6.7 | 11.6 | 18.3% |
| I don't know | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 12 | 19 |
| % | 0 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 10 | 5 | 3.3 | 11.7 | 20 | 31.7% |
| No | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3.3 | 5 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10% |
| No answer | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |

4.3.9 The worth of Allah in everyone's life

Approximately 93% of students, regardless of age and gender, agreed that everybody needs Allah (see Table 9). Almost 7% admitted they did not know if everybody needs Allah, but no child stated that not everyone needed Allah. Fowler indicated in his mythic-literal stage that children at six to twelve years of age also regard their God as the One who is the mightiest, most

powerful, the Maker of everything, the One who is responsible for everything, the Creator of all persons, the guardian, sustainer and provider of all (1981). This finding attempts to explain why the majority of the children were very positive about the importance of Allah in everybody's life. The fact that nearly 7% of the children expressed their doubts about the importance of Allah in every person's life indicates their limited knowledge and comprehension of Allah (Spry & Graham, 2009).

Table 9

Perception of Necessity of Allah

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|----------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| Yes definitely | 6 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 11 | 4 | 4 | 24 | 26 | 50 |
| % | 10 | 8.3 | 13.3 | 10 | 10 | 18.3 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 40 | 43.3 | 83.3% |
| Yes | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| % | 0 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 10% |
| I don't know | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 1.7 | 5 | 6.7% |
| No | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% |

4.3.10 Residence of Allah

The question about the residence of Allah has been subject to a lot of argument in various religions. Fowler (1981) argues that children between seven and nine years are very inquisitive about the existence and residence of Allah. The children mostly ask these two

questions to try to understand their Maker. This finding is proved by the diversification of answers put forward by the respondents. In relation to the children questioned, Table 10 indicates that about 45% believe that Allah is everywhere, and 10% believe He is in the sky. Four children did not have an answer to this question.

Table 10

Dwelling place of Allah

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|-------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| Everywhere | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 14 | 13 | 27 |
| % | 5 | 5 | 6.7 | 5 | 6.6 | 8.3 | 5 | 3.4 | 23.3 | 21.7 | 45% |
| Heaven | 0 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 11 |
| % | 0 | 5 | 1.7 | 6.6 | 0 | 3.3 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 16.6 | 18.3% |
| High in the sky | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| % | 3.3 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 3.3 | 6.7 | 10% |
| I don't know | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 0 | 6.7 | 1.7 | 8.4% |
| By our side, with us | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| % | 1.6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 3.3% |
| In our hearts and souls | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |
| Nobody knows | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 1.7% |
| Other answer | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.6 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 5% |
| No answer | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 1.6 | 0 | 3.3 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 6.6 | 0 | 6.6% |

The diverse responses provided in Table 10 suggest the curiosity of children and their quest for information about Allah. It is important to note that the majority of the responses

appeared to be those they had heard or were told by parents and other friends. Therefore, this is a delicate age for children and they should be supported with appropriate religious education about Allah since they tend to believe everything said about Allah.

4.3.11 Understanding the presence of Allah by observing the beauty of the universe

Most of the students in all age and gender groups stated that the beauty of nature helped them understand the presence of Allah. Fowler's mythic-literal stage of faith points out that children aged six to 12 years use symbols as a way of understanding their world (Spry & Graham, 2009). Children at this stage are able to recount and narrate what they see more than what they learn. This justifies the response given by 95% of the children about understanding Allah by observing the beauty of the universe (see Table 11). Around 5% of the children expressed doubts or responded negatively to the question.

Table 11

Children's Observation of Beauty in the Universe

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|----------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| Yes definitely | 6 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 21 | 11 | 32 |
| % | 10 | 1.7 | 8.4 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 5 | 8.3 | 3.3 | 35 | 18.3 | 53.3% |
| Yes | 0 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 20 | 25 |
| % | 0 | 8.3 | 3.4 | 6.7 | 3.3 | 15 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 8.4 | 33.3 | 41.7% |
| I don't know | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 3.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3.3 | 0 | 3.3% |
| No | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 1.7% |

4.3.12 Being angry with Allah

The majority of the children, about 63%, stated they would not get angry with Allah if they didn't get what they wanted (see Table 12). This showed children's positive trust in Allah and His influence over their lives. Fowler (1981) underscored this point when he stated that children between seven and nine years considered Allah as the One who was the most powerful, the One in charge of everything, protector, sustainer and provider of everything. Six out of the seven children who said they would get angry with Allah were girls. This could be an indication of spiritual challenges concerning the portrayal of Allah and indicates an opportunity for strengthening the understanding about His teachings.

Table 12

Children's Expression of Anger at Allah

| Age | 9 | | 10 | | 11 | | 12 | | Total | | |
|----------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|
| Gender | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Both genders |
| Yes definitely | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 3.3 | 3.3% |
| Yes | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| % | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 6.7 | 8.4% |
| I don't know | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| % | 3.3 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 | 13.3 | 11.7 | 25% |
| No | 4 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 2 | 19 | 19 | 38 |
| % | 6.7 | 3.4 | 8.3 | 10 | 8.3 | 15 | 8.3 | 3.3 | 31.6 | 31.7 | 63.3% |

4.4. Questionnaire data in response to the research questions

This section considers the questionnaire data, reported in section 4.3, in relation to the first two of the three research questions, on student beliefs and their questions. The third research question on student learning is addressed in section 4.5.3, and extended with specific reference to the fourth research question, relating to text books, in Chapter Five.

4.4.1 Response to first research question: What does a group of Muslim primary school children believe about Allah?

All the children emphasised their belief in the existence and oneness of Allah. This was in line with Fowler's research, which concluded that children at this stage develop means of dealing with the world and making sense. However, in this research no child, regardless of age, disputed the fact about the existence and oneness of God (Webster, 1984). The fact that several students also stated that Muhammad was the Messenger of Allah supports Fowler's synthetic-conventional stage that children up to the age of 12 years tend to base their values and beliefs more on the ideologies and judgments of authoritative individuals (1981). When asked whether belief in God is important, about 99% of the children acknowledged this is very important. As Fowler (1981) stated, children aged between nine and 12 years are typically more concerned with the oneness of the Creator. In addition, children at this age also view their Creator as the mightiest, greatest, Maker of everything, One who oversees everything, protector, sustainer, and provider of all (Gurr, 2010). The understanding of their Creator is apparent at this stage.

4.4.2 Response to second research question: What questions do the group of Muslim primary school children have about Allah?

The findings to this question were also in line with Fowler's second stage, mythic-literal faith, which states children aged between seven and nine years are fascinated by the oneness of a sole Creator. They were very inquisitive about several attributes of their Creator such as His

size, where and how He came about, and why there is only one and not any other. They were highly concerned with how they needed to understand their Creator. This was especially the case with children aged between six and 12 years, who considered their Creator as the mightiest, most powerful Creator of everything, the One who oversees everything, the Creator of all humans, defender, sustainer and giver of all. The children were also very inquisitive about the residence of Allah or His dwelling place (Yavuz, 2003). This was especially the case with children between seven and nine years of age. This study argues that children at this age group are very curious and have a deeper desire to get a clear picture of who Allah is and to understand their Maker.

From the responses given, majority of the children had an idea of Allah's nature of omnipresence with a minority still believing in His existence in the skies. This is a call to textbook publishers that there is a need to clearly emphasise Allah's presence in all places through content development. Children should be reminded that Allah is everywhere even in their classrooms and within the school compound. Parents who spend more time with their children after school can also answer some of these questions. This is a call to parents to engage with the content of their children's textbooks and evaluate the appropriateness of the content. They can then help in re-emphasizing the contents through responding effectively to concerns raised by their children. This way, they will help pass the same information to children to avoid contradicting views of Islamic faith. Diverse responses suggest the curiosity of children and their quest for information about Allah. It is important to note that majority of the responses appeared to come from third generation. Therefore, this is a delicate age for children and they should be instilled with the accurate information in religious education about Allah since they tend to believe everything said about Allah.

4.5 Interviews

The interviews offered an opportunity for participants to share their ideas and reflections about Islamic education. The researcher was able to collect information on personal experiences and thoughts, including features of teaching materials that are used to teach Muslim children about Allah.

4.5.1. Teacher interviews

Data were collected through interviews with three teachers who taught religious education at the institution. The researcher interviewed the three religious education teachers for their perception and opinion concerning the textbooks. The teachers' interview was actually a dialogue in which the teachers freely shared their perception of the introduction of Islamic education into the school. As teachers, they have a first-hand experience in teaching Islamic education, which makes their reflection on their teaching experiences and resources highly valuable. The dialogue focused on the textbooks' content and how they are structured to meet the expectations of students of the Muslim faith. This was used as a platform to gain more insight into the content of textbooks used (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview was scheduled in the morning hours and each interview lasted for an hour and a half. Generally, the interviews were conducted so as to collect more information regarding the research questions and the aim of the study. One teacher is the head of the religious department, while the other two are religion teachers.

Two out of three teachers interacted more closely with children than the departmental head did. These two teachers really desired introduction of the religion in the school as it would minimise social and moral challenges faced by students. Indeed, all three teachers emphasised the need to introduce religion in the institution. They asserted that introduction of religion at the primary school level in the institution would open opportunities for primary school children to

be provided with the background information on Islam as well as the ways of dispelling the common misconceptions and stereotypes they could face. Being a fast-growing religion, Islam ought to be introduced in most of the primary schools to match the importance of learning about Islam in school. These teachers stressed that even though some instructors taught about Islamic religion, it was still very limited because of the availability of just a few truly effective teaching resources. The introduction of further resources would support teachers to equip children with relevant skills and knowledge. Through this approach, teachers would be able to further foster healthy relationships with Muslim students and communities.

As much of the discussion with teachers focused on the use of textbooks, the findings have informed Chapter Five, including consideration of the third research question.

4.5.2. Parent interviews

Parents desire to have Islamic religious education introduced in the institution as it will reduce their burden of teaching their children Islamic practices, beliefs and culture. The findings of this study about the parents' perception of the introduction of Islamic education in the institution showed that parents desired modern education system to be founded on the Islamic ideologies. In addition, they thought that their children should not drift away from Islam. The findings also support the previous findings on the desires of Muslim parents for their children in Australia. These studies further proved that parents wanted Islamic education "to educate their children for life in what is hoped that it will be a diverse and tolerant society, not to indoctrinate Muslims with un-Australian values" (Jones, 2012). All of the participants in one study conducted by Clyne desired that their children be introduced to a form of education, which reflected on the Islamic values, beliefs and practices. The question as to why some parents preferred to look for specific schools for their children confirmed that these parents were concerned with the form of education that underpinned Islamic values and beliefs.

From the interview conducted in the study, it is evident that Muslim parents want their children to be provided Islamic education at the primary school level as this will reduce their burden of worrying about the kind of religious teachings they are acquainted with. With the increase of Muslim population in the country, it is necessary to incorporate Muslim education into the system as an approach of appreciating the multi-cultural nature of the country. This strategy will further enable Muslims to effectively use the separate finance set aside to give religious education. Muslim parents additionally desire the number of Muslim schools to be increased for their children to have the opportunity to attend schools they can afford and where their children can be taught comprehensively. These institutions can be the state private schools, or even weekend schools. Parents also desire to supplement parental learning for their children on the religion and Islam, which they acquire from schools. Responses from parents affirmed that the demand of Islamic education in the institution is high as parents are concerned about the curriculum guiding learning activities within the school.

4.5.3 Response to third research question: How do Muslim children learn about Allah?

Teaching children about Allah has been enhanced through various theories and studies on how children learn. The cognitive and affective approaches have been found to be extremely critical in the understanding of Allah by the children. Cognitive and affective approaches are components of religious education that integrate knowledge and skills with life experiences. Cognitive knowledge looks at beliefs, social structures, ethical positions and traditions in relation to religious practices (Buchanan, 2007). In a classroom setting, cognitive outcomes generally lay the ground for knowledge discussion and interpretation. In that case, beliefs affect competence of students' decision-making while learning about Allah. A cognitive approach focuses on the educational content and thus reflects on religious teachings along with ideologies. Teachers can encourage students to share religious thoughts, prayers and concerns in an attempt

to achieve affective outcomes (Boyatzis, 2008). Integration of the religious education program within the school curriculum sets a more accurate and consistent teaching method. Teachers should be actively involved in the structuring of cognitive outcomes of certain skills and knowledge.

An effective approach recognises life experiences in a classroom as it deals with personal reaction to religious knowledge. This approach stimulates feelings, insights and reflective aptitude. However, it may be difficult to control the affective dimension as the teacher tries to influence the mind, values, faith and attitude. Classroom application of interpersonal knowledge by teachers gives learners an opportunity to share personal experiences for the furtherance of the program. Students in a classroom are taught by influencing their minds, thereby affecting faith and values. Thus, cognitive and affective approaches to teaching are interlinked in that knowledge is required to influence behavior and actions (Boyatzis, 2008). Muslim schools should, thus, integrate cognitive and affective methods in teaching about Allah to point on beliefs, rituals, ethics, stories and historical background. Hence, cognitive and affective processes promote religious teaching by assisting students make sense of teachings and resultant outcomes.

Muslim educators and parents should feel obligated to teach children about love and respect towards God and His teachings. Religion should not be viewed as a formality, but should rather be an activity that satisfies the hearts of the children. Children should love to learn and follow Islam rather than being forced to follow their parents' path by instilling religion at the right time and in the right manner. Children should be motivated to read the *Qur'an* and pray to Allah for the ability to understand and be guided by the holy book in the right path according to the wishes of Allah. Lastly, as indicated in the section above, when children are in their early

years (7-12), it is a key time for the ideas of Islam and the importance of Allah to be instilled in them with great love (Graham et al., 2005).

Using Fowler's stages of faith, different age groups of children have been identified in which the children's faith develops. For instance, it has been ascertained that the ages between two and seven years, which is referred to as the intuitive and projective stage, are very critical in the development of faith. It is at this stage that children will start applying new tools of speech and symbolic representation to organise their sensory experiences into meaning units. This is the stage during which children will express a lot of curiosity and be inquisitive about their surroundings. This can be a good time to introduce the concept of faith to children, as well as the related concepts about Allah. The other stage is referred to as the mythic-literal faith stage, which should be presented to children between the ages of six and twelve. This stage is characterised by children grasping basic concepts of the world through imagination. At this stage, children are best introduced to the concepts of faith and Allah through pictures that symbolise good and evil. It is critical for children to be shown the benefits of being good and the costs of being poor through the use of symbolic stories. The next stage is referred to as synthetic and conventional stage - it relates to children aged 12 who are conscious about their faith in day-to-day activities. The children's values are based on judgments and ideologies of authoritative individuals or groups. Although children in this group will be fully aware of the ideologies, they will not necessarily all reflect on the meaning of faith in the same ways. The other important theory is one that was brought forward by Elkind - he identifies that children are likely to fall into three major groups: first, second and third stages (1978). The first stage refers to children between five and seven years of age - they are identified as having the same kind of approach, understanding and thinking. The second stage refers to children between seven and nine years of age - children's intelligence is developing, and they start developing religious belief and ideas.

The third stage refers to children between ten and twelve years of age - children transform their thinking further in terms of faith.

4.7. Conclusion

The survey revealed that most children believed in the existence and the oneness of Allah. 96.6% of the children who responded to the survey questions believe that Allah exist. None of the children stated they never believed in the existence of Allah. 52% of the children stated they believed Allah existed because of the evidence offered by his creations. There were students who also stated Muhammad was a messenger of Allah, hence qualifying. There were discrepancies on how children believed in the existence of god. Fowler states children from a religious family better understand the existence of god (1981). However, most of the children acknowledged the existence of Allah through other attributes, such as he is the all-knowing, the all-seeing, helpful and loving. Most children (60%) revealed they were always interested in knowing about god. 98.3% of the children also revealed that belief was very important in their lives. Over 85% of the children stated they read the *Qur'an* and prayed all the time. 87% of the children also stated they believed people were created with belief in Allah. The children also said they believed that Allah was worthy in everyone's life.

The key aim of this study was to understand the significance of introducing Islamic religion in primary schools, specifically in the one this study was conducted in. This thesis has put forth the argument that the beliefs of children about Allah are effectively transmitted mainly through religious textbooks. Interviews were significant tools in understanding the perspectives of the participants without limiting them to answering given questions. From the interviews conducted in this study, it is clear that both teachers and parents want Islamic religion to be taught in primary schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF TEXTBOOKS

5.1 Introduction

Ten textbooks meeting the requirements of the thesis were used in this research study. This chapter presents analysis of these textbooks. These textbooks were selected based on availability in the case study school. All these textbooks were published in English. To state the obvious, English is critical for all Australian students, regardless of their religious beliefs. Most Muslims in the country understand the need to have proper knowledge of English to achieve the academic results requested for both their future employment, and effective daily communication.

5.2 Overview of the textbooks

The textbooks used for this study are predominantly designed to teach introductory knowledge about Islam. They are aimed at younger generations that are being initiated into the Islamic culture and thus have to introduce the basic concepts that help them form strong knowledge about Islamic teachings. These have been highlighted in the following textbooks, which are summarised in the following section:

5.2.1. Religion and values

Aldemir, H., Erdil, M., Kartalci, M., & Kirazli, S. (2009). *Religion and values*. Melbourne: Lotus Publications

As indicated by Aldemir et al., religion is involved in the installation of the right behaviors in children so that they attach value to life. In addition, the texts introduce an idea of good living and proper handling of life and matters of social justice (2009). The same idea is echoed by Ansari, Sadoun and Yousef. In addition, Aldemir emphasises the need to bring up children in the right way of knowing God and developing morals (2009). These morals are essential for the growth and development of an individual, both intellectually and socially.

When parents advise their children or discipline, start developing necessary social skills for living harmoniously in a community. It is also essential to teach children to discipline themselves, both in terms of feelings and relationship with other human beings. Values derived from religious studies or religion are critical to the growth of every soul.

5.2.2. *I love Islam*

Ansari, A., Sadoun, N., & Yousef, M. (2007). *I love Islam*. Dallas, TX: Islamic Services Foundation.

This text concentrates on the Islamic religion and its teachings. Those who dedicate themselves to the Muslim faith know the benefit vested in such actions. The Muslim community believes in shared responsibilities - the community looks after the children and young ones. If the children need anything, their parents are there to provide it - vice versa, children reciprocate by obeying their parents through actions. This strengthens the bond between parents and their young ones both at the community and family level. The text by Ansari, Sadoun and Yousef (2007) enables student to interact personally with the information in the way that makes them feel comfortable about it. The portrayed curriculum in the book challenges the students in an intuitive, creative and reflective manner by providing various real-life situations children can analyze.

The ample opportunities provided by this book further enable personal reflection on belief through information, activities, and discussion topics. Hence, the learner's perspective of the world in a religious context is changed – such as, for example, mentioning or elaborating on non-Islamic religious celebrations like Easter and Christmas, and instances of religious bias towards Muslims in a way that represents them as religious criminals. Hence, these issues in the academic curriculum (textbooks) are perceived by staunch Muslims as a violation of the spiritual aspects and social regulations that rule personal conduct of the students. The textbook

is written in a manner that keeps provoking the ethical question about the Islamic religion and its attitude towards matters of high contention.

5.2.3. Studies in Islam.

Aziz, A. (2003). *Studies in Islam*. New Delhi: Kazi Publications.

Islamic studies, according to Aziz, were introduced into the world by Prophet Mohammed. He was by God to be the teacher to Muslims and communicate His will and directions that should be followed. An *imam* or the teacher need to have the necessary skills and competence to lead the young ones as well as provide them with knowledge about God and the means through which religion can be practiced, along with the introduction of worship places that are set for learning within the schools.

Aziz (2003) advises that teachers must come from the Muslim community and go through rigorous training skills. Students, on the other hand, must be well prepared to undertake studies and meet the suggested minimum age for particular religious practices. An example includes observance of the fast on the month of Ramadan. Children below certain age cannot participate fully in this practice due to their delicate nature in enduring without food. Similarly, pregnant women should also be excused from the practice for their health, which makes the religion sensitive about the everyday needs of human beings. Moreover, each and every age group in the community is categorised into certain section in the religious world and act and perform rituals in certain ways. Children have to learn to read the *Qur'an*. This textbook stresses the Muslim identity children can identify with and advise as to how they can unite and overcome social challenges they encounter in their environment. Aziz (2003) further illustrates the struggles of this group against self-definition and marginalization. Through individual interviews, the author evaluates the most influential Islamic organizations and their geographic

and social objectives. From the interviews, the book argues that Islamic revival has been significant for overcoming difficulties among the contemporary minority communities.

5.2.4. Our faith and worship.

Ghazi, A., & Ghazi, T. K. (2002a). *Our faith and worship*. Chicago, IL: Iqra' International Education Foundation.

The text by Ghazi and Ghazi outlines differences in perception of various religious groups in the world (2002a). Muslim students within public schools and other academic settings have long been negatively perceived and treated, especially after the September 11. Therefore, criminalization of the Muslim identity is among the major discussions within academic institutions. Strong intercultural links among students were disrupted due to religious difference. The Ghazi and Ghazi (2002a) textbook plays an integral role in promoting Islamic education through emphasizing the strategies teachers can apply to influence children. The text additionally argues that teachers should enhance academic curriculum by acknowledging and highlighting the various roles played by Islam and Muslim worshippers throughout the history and today. The book presents various needs and interests of the Muslim population, constantly increasing in Australia. For example, Allah is referred to as the Creator and the only God. This is a basic and most fundamental foundation in Islamic studies. Not only are the children educated on the nature of Allah, but their knowledge of His prophets and faith is strongly reinforced, too.

5.2.5. Teaching of the Qur'an.

Ghazi, A. & Ghazi, T. K. (2002b). *Teaching of the Qur'an*. Chicago: Iqra' International Education Foundation.

The book by Ghazi and Ghazi (2002b) is designed to strengthen the relationship between the Islamic children and their counterparts from other religions. It is intriguing that the book

contains information which is still contentious within the Islamic religion, especially among parents and their children - this is in regard to the moral aspects of the Islamic religion. It is perceived immoral to openly discuss certain issues in the classroom, including texts that have reference to sexual content, use of drugs, sensitive music, cases of crime and immorality.

5.2.6. Learning about Islam.

Emerick, Y. (1998). *Learning about Islam*. NY: Islamic Foundation of North America.

Emerick's (1998) text is structured on the educational aspect of Muslim faith and activities. Thus, it shares important content about Islamic faith and teaching of the good behaviors in life. The book authors argue that if students are taught how to work and relate well with others, then this society would be a better place to live in. Skepticism and stereotypes would be a theme of the past if the strategies provided in this text are exercised well. It is therefore essential for educators and institutions to be well-equipped with adequate resources to overcome social inequalities. This can only be achieved through the introduction of religious education, which will actively engage the students.

According to the parents interviewed in this study, an integrated approach needs to be incorporated into the curriculum to manage the effects of social barriers and overcome cross-cultural challenges. Through these approaches, challenges in educational experiences shall have been overcome. In addition to the research carried out by Emerick and others, the study highlights closure of a local college due to cultural diversity (1998). To overcome issues related to the closure of the institution, the authors suggest that it is vital to introduce innovative approaches to teaching with regards to quality education.

Due to variation of Islamic practices, the findings in the text by Emerick suggest that in an academic environment, all students should be taught Islamic practices to understand fellow Muslim students and overcome stereotypes and ridicule (1998). Cultural attitudes and social

experiences among the students are explored in relation to school initiatives and social discourses. It is therefore essential for prevailing systems to be incorporated within socio-political dynamics outside academic institutions. From the perspective of the authors, cultural attitudes and social insecurities are significant in the education, particularly among the students of the Islamic background. In as much as public schools may encounter instances of racism, especially towards the minority groups, teachers and the administration should ensure transformation towards a positive, unprejudiced school environment.

The challenge with many of these textbooks is that they still have their content rooted in the Western countries, with European examples. Emerick (1998), however, meets the qualification of a good religious textbook, as his text is relevant to children through catering for their needs. The literature compiles information on the Muslim community for new and potential Muslims. The book covers basic Islamic teachings and practices, the path to Muslim truth, and offers further texts on Islam and basic Islamic terms.

Information and language used to explain events are appropriate for the age group. There are also short stories and fables to attract this audience, with engaging graphics that suit young readers. Furthermore, the textbook is visually attractive as it has minarets of a mosque on the front cover, which immediately attracts the Muslim audience; however, brighter colors could have been used to make it even more attractive to children. Attractive patterns and borders are detailed throughout the textbook as well as illustrations that catch the attention and interest of the reader.

5.2.7. Combating racism and prejudice in schools: Keynote 6, The Abrahamic religions; Islam.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2008). *Combating racism and prejudice in schools: Keynote 6, The Abrahamic religions; Islam*. Melbourne: DEECD,

This study by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2008) is essential in teaching the upcoming generations on religious observances, teachings, beliefs, background of Islam and political differences within the religion. According to the study, the entire community shall be educated on the pillars of Islam, roles and responsibilities of Muslims, moral code and other religious observances. By introducing this religion within an education institution in Australia, the administrators will facilitate effective teaching of Islam to children in Australian context. Furthermore, this will offer an opportunity for the academic administrators to apply for the funds allocated for the Muslims to promote Islamic religion. Children will thus be able to accept and understand each other by incorporating non-Muslim learning exercises into Islamic practices and applying Muslim perspectives throughout the entire curriculum.

5.2.8. The Australian Muslim student

Chelebi, M., & Engebretson, K. (2008). *The Australian Muslim student*. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Catholic University.

The Australian Muslim Student by Chelebi (2008) focuses on the rich cultural diversity among the Muslim and Christian students. Written for both Muslims and non-Muslims, the book emphasises religious practices, giving the readers balanced understanding of Islamic teachings. Muslim religion history in Australia is reviewed, deconstructing certain myths and misconceptions about the religion, thereby offering the educators a series of activities to be employed in the teaching of religion. Educators using these resources also benefit greatly from the recommended list. Information contained in the book is reliable to both primary and secondary students in Australia. Additionally, teachers and other academic administrators can apply these resources in setting up classroom, school, and playground facilities. These offers stimulating opportunities for students to exercise their faith. Unlike other textbooks with diverse

perspectives, the book has an Australian context, hence quite specific in relation to the strategies to be applied.

5.2.9. Muslim Australians: Their beliefs, practices and institutions

Saeed, A., & Australia Department of Immigration Multicultural Indigenous Affairs. (2004). *Muslim Australians: Their beliefs, practices and institutions*. Canberra: Dept. of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and Australian Multicultural Foundation in association with the University of Melbourne.

Saeed, et al. (2004) is another influential support for teaching children about Islam in Australia. The lead writer is an Australian Muslim educationist. The resource introduces Islamic education to children by giving them a background on the religion, observations and cultural practices. The book quantifies the contributions of Muslims to Australia such as the introduction of camels to the interior portions of the region. Children are further equipped with the knowledge of modern Australian Muslims and their significant roles. The Muslim population in Australia has escalated to 600,000 and Islam has become Australia's second-biggest religion, which is a 77% rise in the past decade, according to 2016 Census. Therefore, understanding the traditions of Islam and its main beliefs is of greater relevance to more children in Australia. In terms of basic values and beliefs, and apart from the five pillars of Islam, the differences between Islamic religion and other religions in the nation are minimal.

Children are able to easily understand this resource in the absence of a teacher since it is written in a simple and easily understandable manner. From an early age, children can understand and differentiate issues of concern to common citizens. Since most children are brought up knowing the English language, children using these resources will experience minimum challenges. Children can understand the requirements of the religion and acknowledge

Allah as their one and only deity. This is because this resource equips children with knowledge on diverse issues, such as the reason why Allah allows evil and suffering in the humanity.

5.2.10. Building interfaith and intercultural understandings in Australian schools

Hassim, E., & Cole-Adams, J. (2011). *Building interfaith and intercultural understandings in Australian schools*. Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies.

Hassim and Cole-Adams illustrate how teachers can introduce Islamic education to classroom subjects like mathematics, history, English, science, and across curricula perspectives (2011). The reader is guided on how Muslim students can achieve positive results through engaging and identifying them with the practices and customs. Islamic beliefs and practices are introduced to children, as well as the guidelines on how to behave like a Muslim. Hassim and Cole-Adams continue to emphasize that it is essential to train future citizen's spiritual aspects to guide them socially (2011). This is because the future of the nation is largely formed in the classes and in schools. Respect, humility and understanding are among the major values of the country, which can be instilled to primary school children through the strategies and techniques applied in religious studies. The study highlights various strategies applied in different schools as a bid to foster intercultural and interfaith consciousness. The objective is to ensure that students can live in harmony among major ethnic groups and still appreciate their religious background.

Hassim and Cole-Adams affirm the significance of equipping teachers well even though they may be ineffectively nurturing Muslim children due to limitation of teaching aids (2011). The article, however, remains a useful source to children as it offers more options teachers can apply to introduce Islamic education into classrooms. Teachers are additionally equipped with skills to meet the needs and expectations of the children. They are able to facilitate a

comprehensive institutional approach for enhancing healthy relationships with Muslim students (Hassim & Cole-Adams, 2011).

5.3 General discussion of the texts

The textbooks have the content aimed at reaching Muslims, who currently comprise almost one-third of the global population (Department of Education and Training, 2003). The textbook contents are geared towards highlighting issues that currently revolve around the Islamic world of politics, economics, education, health and sports activities. The content is also beneficial to non-Muslim students since they get to interact and empower their cultural understanding and global perspectives of Islamic issues in discussions. These books are designed to provide assistance and engage with new Islamic migrants refugees in Australia and in the process of learning English language. From the studies conducted, it is essential to introduce a curriculum, which will foster practical applications of cultural variation in the minds of the students and produce a good society.

As mentioned before, there is a great deal of information and data online. In religious education, however, there will always be textbooks, references and prescribed texts to benefit from. For this very reason, faith-inspired schools, communities and school boards will always be around to “dictate” which quality textbooks will best serve the interest of their specific communities. According to Rossiter, the effectiveness of placing good materials in students’ hands is seen in their study on religion (2000). The materials, coupled with the teacher’s inbuilt philosophy of teaching, will help deliver a rich learning strategy.

Teachers who teach the cognitive meaning of the faith tradition must be well acquainted with them for the purpose of being confident about their knowledge of tradition and their skills. This is only possible when they are well-equipped with a wide source of information from books (Ryan, 2000). The author claims that the major weakness in this requirement is that the

clerical hierarchy is the main determinant in the choice of religious textbooks. However, they are predominantly male, unskilled in educational theory and have conservative values. There is an added complexity of the interpretation of the religious text by teachers and students. According to Engebretson (2000), high-quality religious education explores the historical context, liturgical approaches, and socio-cultural and ethical aspects by involving learners in the study of literature and stimulating advanced thinking, and simultaneously paying attention to the learners' cognitive and emotional wellbeing. On the other hand, by studying the text, students learn about the most recent developments related to doctrinal and sacred studies, and in turn, the findings of these recent studies are applied in the text, or featured as cited information. The book by Aldemir et al. emphasises the diversity of religious commitment and cultures. Through this, generalizations and assumptions that all students have similar beliefs and faith practices are negated. The text upholds language that unites students lacking a strong connection to religion.

5.4 Analysis of the Texts

Analysis of the textbooks examined in this study inform the consideration of a number of reflective questions. These culminate in the analysis provided in section 5.5 and response to the third research question in 5.5.2. The questions below provide the opportunity to consider features of learning afforded through the textbooks.

5.4.1. How is Allah taught to children as part of curriculum?

This question was selected with an aim of analyzing how the current curriculum in the educational sector has embraced the dimension of change in incorporating religious studies in Australian teaching practice. This is because, over the past years, religion was a very contentious issue that sparked controversy and debates, especially in terms of conflicting religious opinions and perspectives among Muslim and Christian students and/or others. The challenge is that, despite this controversial nature, the religious aspect is still essential in the

process of teaching development of a country, thus it cannot be overlooked. Teaching students about Allah is of significant importance since the root foundations of the Islamic religion are belief in the oneness of God (Douglas, 2011).

5.4.2. Which methods are used?

This question seeks to evaluate the various methods teachers put into practice within the classroom to teach the Islamic religion. This is because, as McNeilage argues, there is a great need to use teaching methods that recall basic Islamic values and beliefs (2013). The objectives of Islamic education are numerous. Thus, there is no single formula within the education system that can be solely voted as the best teaching method. Teachers are given autonomy to make the best selection of a teaching method that will work best for their students and promote high levels of children participation, depending on their educational system and learning environments. The methods should enhance abilities of the students in line with the subject matter being studied. This implies that various approaches may be appropriate, especially in reinforcing the Islamic doctrine in depth. The available teaching methods that Islamic teachers could adapt include using the question and answer system, lectures, examples, stories and note taking, depending on those deemed to be most appropriate. Methods used by the school include asking questions to assess student understanding, competitions were employed to motivate students and express their knowledge, use of stories and examples from daily life, and the use of visual aids as the concept of Allah can be difficult for children to understand. The teachers had effectively adapted these methods into their teaching. For example, stories were used to gain students' attention while note taking helped them remember information more easily.

5.4.3. What are the strengths of the textbooks?

The Islamic religion plays a critical role in the process of understanding historical events, activities, leading individuals and society as a whole. It is thus essential for the textbooks

to present information in a manner that is attractive to the children to reinforce their understanding of such issues. The strength of the textbooks is a question designed to evaluate the presentation of facts and omission of other critical details that may enhance the understanding of students. This is because any important information left out may only mislead the students and give them false impression of the Islamic religion. The titles of textbooks used in this study can be found under section 5.2. There is a need for children to understand the basic symbols, concepts and beliefs of the Islamic faith. This calls for striking methods of presentation that makes the information memorable through colored pictures, drawings and diagrams. The textbooks in this study were especially prepared for Australian primary school students, taking into consideration their experiences. Similar textbooks from other parts of the world may not have the same examples that Australian children can relate to. Thus, the textbooks are considered appropriate for Australian audience.

5.4.4. What are their limitations?

The question of the limitations seeks to evaluate how the textbooks address the issue of the students' needs in knowing the Islamic faith, the general textbook layout and whether information is presented in a friendly language to the children to enhance easier understanding and proper memorization. A limitation could be any example of bias that casts the negative light over the Islamic religion, especially those written by scholars from Western countries. Parts of the content may not match the age requirements of the students. For example, it is not suitable for young children to learn about Hell in detail but it was in one of the textbooks. Some of the weakness of these books are demonstrated in the fact that they tend to give more information on Allah without leading to a comparison with other beliefs in order to create high level of understanding.

5.4.5 Are they relevant to children?

The need to teach doctrines of Islam is essential to enable the young generation to have clear knowledge that can help them conceive the realities of the events taking place within their environments. The major goal of teaching the children about Islamic aspects of theology is to impart more knowledge spiritually to enable them to overcome the current Western notions of Islamic ethical globalization. The lessons must be relevant to the children, in order to enable them to understand not only their history but also how to deal with contemporary issues, like secular humanism. For example, *Learning about Islam* was a bit advanced for the children as compared to the *Religion & Values* textbook, which was at a more suitable level. This is because such ideologies often tend to influence the minds of young children.

5.4.6. Can these books satisfactorily answer children's questions about Allah?

This question seeks to establish the credibility of the publishers of the religious educational books to empower children. This means that Islamic clerics and experts need resources to address the key concerns about Allah children have at young ages, within the religious content of the texts. It also seeks to address the parents' commitment in knowing what their children are being taught in school. The texts support parents' commitment to work with teachers to ensure relevant content, and not misleading perceptions, are being passed down to the younger generations. The question also puts the concept of Allah into the Australian environment, offering a great deal of diversity, including Christianity and other religions; thus, there is a need to distinguish Allah in the context of the various available religions.

5.4.7. Is the material interesting for children?

This question seeks to understand the measures and strategies used by teachers, to not only make the children understand Islamic religion through their textbooks, but to sustain their interest in the whole learning process, as well. Research findings indicate that most often

teachers focus only on passing religious knowledge to the children without emphasizing the use of modern techniques and materials. In addition, the question is aimed at identifying whether most of the Islamic education teachers have mastered the application of various teaching aids in the classroom set-up. This is because some have complained about the heavy workload that hinders them from delivering effective teaching of religious studies. Children also have various ways of learning and require elements that make their lessons memorable; thus, the question is aimed at evaluating all these factors. This depends on the type of language used and the balance between text and illustrations in the books. It is true that children find pleasure in reading a good story that makes them laugh. On the other end, there are different scenarios in these books that make an individual feel and believe that the issues discussed fit well to the age groups. Some of them include creation of funny characters that makes the story sweet to hear and easy to remember. Islamic context does not discourage innovation and inclusion of new and diverse strategies that individuals may incorporate in making the story interesting or a book attractive. However, there are restrictions related to which information or data can be applied in the context of religious studies or observance of the *Qur'an*. The setting of the classroom and social facilities can be organised to make children feel comfortable and ready to participate. The opposite is true in regard to authenticity and simplicity of material and resources used by children.

5.4.8. Is the language used suitable and easy to understand for children?

Teachers in primary schools resort to methods that support teaching and learning. They have also started to prefer dispositional systems to support learning (Carr & Claxton, 2004; Hyde, 2012). In spite of the fact that securing of learning abilities and capabilities is a fundamental feature of religious education, contemporary researches indicate the demonstration of the learning process that should develop beyond the thinking and concerns of other non-

cognitive extents. Nonetheless, there is minimal evidence that dispositional framework should be recommended for religious education in the early childhood in Islamic schools. This introduces a challenge for contemporary religious teachers of children in primary schools, in which results-based theories center upon self-evident capabilities rather than the techniques learners use in their academic process. The language is suitable for the selected age group. However, there is a need to improve and simplify some of the vocabularies to make them easy for the specific users. *Religion & Values* incorporates stories that are relevant to children and make them laugh when reading. The situation is different when using diverse sources of information due to the nature of language applied in structuring the text. Therefore, the authors of the books were extremely cautious in relation to the target audience. The *Religion & Values* and *I love Islam* textbooks were the best in term of suitability for age groups.

5.4.9. How does each of the books measure up to the criteria for a good religion textbook described earlier in this proposal?

A high-quality religious educational textbook is attractive in visual display and very compelling. It should instruct through the printed words as well as by the appealing illustrations of accepted or contemporary symbolization which improve and expand the content. Such a textbook encourage young learners to investigate their past, present and future through the printed word into music, craft, verse and building design. An excellent religious educational textbook affirms the role played by modern information technology in the process of learning and in the educational curriculum. It thus furnishes and supports learners to use this innovation to discover progressively about subjects under attention (Rossiter, 1983). It is straightforward and very direct in nature. This does not imply that vocabulary needs to be excessively oversimplified or that style ought to bore, but a balance needs to be created between the two extremes. The book often suggests more action, which indicates that its unobtrusive mental

associations frequently emerge through narration. A good textbook targeting a child is all about religion at the childhood level; it depicts religion from a child's point of view, is full of hope and optimism for the future of the Islamic religion under discussion, and tends to rely on stories.

More intriguing religious educational textbooks reflect ambivalence about yearning to grow up and the energizing dangers of experience, longing to be pure and experienced, longing to be an adult, but adhere to child-like memories and so on. Generally, child-related teaching focuses on the process of facilitating learning rather than demanding. An all-inclusive topic is educating children that religion is the ultimate goal, as well as developing a personal relationship with Allah. The textbook also has a repetitive element. Repeating assignment are fundamental in learning and training. Reiteration is a common quality of literary works. Reiterations with varieties of statements, expressions, scenarios and story examples are regular in children's literature. Quite a few books are essentially highly instructional (showing them how to act like mature people) or ideal (reflecting a longing to hold the purity of their youthfulness); most books, however, combine the two methodologies (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008).

5.5. Discussion of findings from the analysis of textbooks

5.5.1 Features of excellent textbook

Textbooks or course book series used in religious education can incite various achievements – they can fill in the educational gaps, providing the big picture to the children, which, in turn, lays the foundation for stronger educational basis in Islamic religion. Religious educational textbooks and different assets help teachers settle on choices about precisely what will happen in the classroom. A great textbook can provide educators with services and latest information related to the most appropriate educational program. An exceptional religious education textbook, in the hands of a great teacher, is an instrument that is completely subject to

the benefits it will produce for the children in the class. It helps the teacher and learner by providing information, recommending exercises, furnishing talk inquiries to help learners think about the data offered and to take it further in analysis and relating to personal experiences. Compared to other textbooks, these textbooks are more age appropriate in terms of visual layout and content. This includes having more images, more stories and more appropriate language.

Exceptional content helps teachers through thorough analysis of work in the classroom. It can captivate Islamic studies in the broadest sense, inclusive of aptitudes - from appreciation, requisition, dissection, questioning and assessment to reflection, consideration, instinct and inventiveness. Another finding of this study analysis is that religious education textbooks represent a part of education process and are not received uncritically as supplanting an astute educational program improvement that can help teachers and scholars accomplish brilliance in religious education (Rossiter, 1983).

5.5.2 Response to the third research question: Which features of teaching materials used to teach Muslim children about Allah are most helpful? Why?

Textbooks have succeeded in playing integral roles in promoting Islamic education through the academic curriculum by acknowledging and highlighting the various roles played by Islamic religion and Muslim worshippers during the historical period and the modern day. The books are effective in representing the various desires and interests of the Muslim population that is increasing in Australia. Islamic religious education textbooks should satisfactorily answer children's questions about Islam. They should help students understand the knowledge without the help of the teacher on a basic level.

Text-books ought to be relevant to the children in terms of catering for their needs. Religious education textbooks should have enough exercises or activities to help children learn and master the religious concepts. Religious education textbooks should always be upgraded

and updated to keep up with the demands of present days' educational needs. The examples used in these books should be relevant for Australia today. Information coverage in the Islamic religious education textbooks should be inclusive of the most appropriate and suitable texts from the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah* and the inner lives of significant people highlighted in the book, as these people are the role models for students. The textbooks must also appeal to the interests of the age group the textbook targets. Islamic textbooks should be coherent, concise and take children on an educational journey that is thematically sound. This can be achieved by using diagrams, concept maps or charts.

A good textbook elaborates on the historical, ethical, cultural and scriptural aspects of issues to enhance the development of the children's psychology in this regard. The level of language used and the information arrangement should be engaging to the minds of the children to use their logical thinking. A good textbook will also give students an opportunity to access steps in the current process of development in terms of spiritual scholarship by the use of various methodologies in the textbook, as part of the published information. A good textbook should be cognizant of the diversity factor. It acknowledges that children are from different backgrounds and thus their levels of religious commitment vary from unbelief to belief while others remain in between these states. The book thus acknowledges different religious cultures present within the Australian schools. This implies the textbook does not delve into making generalizations regarding the student, nor does it use of language that is presumptive in nature, assuming all children have common beliefs and share their faith practice. The language, style, and chapters used must not alienate children who may not understand Allah from the onset of their educational journey. This implies a good textbook provides information that is excellent and respects the religious freedom of the students to interact with the information provided in a way they can personally understand. In as much as it creates this sense of freedom for the

children, it simultaneously provokes their intuition and levels of creativity at reflective levels. It gives children the opportunity to reflect on their personal belief through the various activities, discussions held and examples of prayers to be mastered.

5.6. Conclusion

It is worth noting that not every children's religious textbook can meet the entire requirements of the set standards of excellence. This can only imply that, in many cases, the value of a religious educational textbook will often outweigh the various aspects that might be either questionable or problematic in nature. Curriculum developers in Australia and across the globe should therefore focus on examining children's religious textbooks for critical elements like historical accuracies, the realistic types of lifestyles for Islamic believers, significant people to emulate, and the use of authentic language that is in line with the target audience – children, in this case.

Religion is essential in the life of each individual, as it sets the foundation for a stronger relationship with a Supreme Being. In this case, Muslims can develop their association with Allah through His word. The religious textbooks selected for children in schools must, thus, provide representation of various settings that are inclusive of approaches used in problem solving, life realities on faith and belief. The books should also present and provide the appropriate opportunities for young children in schools to enable them to consider various perspectives and religious values. The books ought to be designed in a multicultural way, addressing not only the issues of a limited group of people but all children with Islamic background. Another important factor of children accessing religious education textbook is that they provoke various challenging questions regarding the meaning of life and Islamic beliefs about Allah, His Prophets, the nature of facing faith-oriented realities, issues pertaining to good or bad, right and wrong, and the implications on a Muslim's life. Islamic religious education

helps in advancing and developing the knowledge of a pupil towards understanding the basic concepts, principals, traditions and worldviews of other religions like Christianity, and harmonious coexistence with other religions. Such education provides opportunities for the personal reflection of the children in schools and enhances their spiritual development. It upgrades the children's mindfulness and comprehension of religions and convictions, teachings, practices and types of declarations, and in addition, the impact of religion on people, families, groups and societies.

Religious education influences how children gain experience from distinctive religions, convictions, qualities and customs while investigating their own specific convictions and inquiries of importance. It challenges the students to think about, examine, decipher and assess issues of truth, conviction, confidence and morals and to convey their reactions. Religious education, using quality textbooks, helps children advance their feelings of character and having a place in the society. It empowers them to prosper exclusively inside their groups and as subjects in a pluralistic social order. Religious instruction is significant in preparing students for adult life, work and deep-rooted studying. It empowers students to improve regard for and affectability to others, specifically those whose beliefs and convictions are unique in their own way. It promotes wisdom and empowers students to battle prejudice. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that parents have a significant role in advancing the religious educational textbooks' content in the children's worldview. They are not only expected to send children to an Islamic educational institution to study the integrated curriculum, but also ensure they provide adequate textbooks for their children, as well as the necessary guidance on how to become good Muslims. They should reinforce what the teachers have taught in schools in order to improve children's abilities of reading and writing about Allah.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Concluding discussion

This research argues that it is essential to introduce Islamic education to primary school children and children at an early age in order to address their democratic right to faith development. The main objective of the research was to identify aspects of Islamic religious education of primary school children as observed in a school in Sydney, Australia. The study further sought to determine children's beliefs about Allah and the potential of religious education textbooks in effectively teaching belief in Allah to Muslim children. Current changes are reflected in the teaching profession with educators playing an essential role in religious knowledge and faith development in primary schools. However, the purpose of education is complex (Naquin, 1980). Potentially, in the setting of the present *Education Act*, which values diversity, there is an opportunity to consider the motivation behind religious education in schools. The essential aim of education is to advance the full potential of every child, considering the children's profound, ethical and spiritual needs. In the school participating in this research, religious education is seen as supporting citizenship, empowering the child to improve otherworldly and ethical values, and to support the learning of Allah (Khalediy, 2010).

Arabic language is the main language of Islam. This language defines education through three different terms: the formal definition which refers to impartation of education through instructions or teaching, the spiritual and the ethical through God's will, and there is the culture and guided social behavior. This definition illustrates a complete person in all dimensions of a personality (Al-Atta, 2009). To balance this growth in a person, formal education should be incorporated with Islamic education starting from early childhood. This will further enable children to meet the Islamic goal of living an honorable and ethical life. Additionally, through introduction of Islamic education in primary schools, students are able to acquire the intellectual

and spiritual knowledge to stimulate their moral and spiritual consciousness, resulting in committed and righteous living (Al-Atta, 2009; Sewall, 2008).

Most of the expositive expression composed of Islamic instructive thought was intended to manage general issues, such as, foundations, teachers, and so on. Instructing and studying were extremely significant in Islamic society. However, no deliberate investigation of the present routines has been attempted. Examining and portraying the instructive frameworks by considering Islam is, consequently, a fascinating test. Islam is a learning-based religion, a religion of the Book – it reveals what the individuals said and completed in each phase and period and how they attempted to verify the conduct of people. The Muslim instructive arrangement of our times benefits from a rich social legacy that goes over to the ascent of Islam (Khalediy, 2010). Since Muslim civilization has religion as its binding force, it is regularly dependent upon the *Qur'an* and the Prophetic customs (collectively referred to as *hadiths*). The *Qur'an* proposes the standards, which direct man's existence and manage his relationship with Allah, his fellowmen and his neighborhood. It is, also, a school of philanthropy, persistence, fulfilment of the guarantee, benevolence and appreciation for the parents. Since all standards of righteousness are held in the *Qur'an*, the sacred book must be the foundation of education. On the basis of *Qur'an* and the practice and declarations of Prophet Muhammad, researchers have manufactured and advanced an entire arrangement of behavior for the individual, the group and the state (Khalediy, 2010). Several establishments have been made related to the necessity of educating children on Islamic faith and beliefs. All these establishments are additionally strengthened when this sort of training is impelmented within the context of duty, religious flexibility and human rights. In order to achieve its objectives, the research study was guided by three major questions whose responses generated the findings of the research.

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What do Muslim primary school children believe about Allah?
- What questions do Muslim primary school children have about Allah?
- How do Muslim children learn about Allah?
- Which features of teaching materials used to teach Muslim children about Allah most helpful? Why?

The data from this thesis evidenced children at the case study school having a strong commitment to a relationship with Allah, and saw him as having an important presence in their lives. Their questions and comments reflected developmental stages of faith development, and membership within their family cultural and religious contexts.

Children learned about Allah with the support and guidance of both family and school, with texts providing a key resource for learning. The findings in this research established various aspects that characterise a good textbook in religious education - to satisfactorily answer children's questions on Islam, promote children's understanding without necessarily having to rely heavily on teachers, and are relevant in covering topics that are aligned to the children's needs, have enough exercises or activities and finally are updated with current questions and concerns about Islam and the Islamic issues. It is highlighted that the textbooks used in the schools ought to provide learner-centered content. The language and design approach must target the children. The instructions need to be teacher-friendly with enough references and instructions to guide activities in the classroom. These books should include pictures and illustrations that enhance the understanding of the content and make it memorable for the children. Comprehensive textbooks may also use narratives to cogently express the Islamic religious concepts and notions. The textbooks thus help children to understand the characters in the books and admire some of them, even imitate them as role models. Such detailed

illustrations used in the book may enable school children to understand and feel contented with the basics of Muslim faith.

6.2. Key recommendations from the research

The following recommendations emanate from the findings of this research:

- Since the Muslim population is increasing in Australia, it is necessary to change the dynamics in the learning environments to align the Islamic teaching contents with the current needs of children in society. It is thus necessary for Muslim education leadership to conduct occasional reviews of the published textbooks within schools to ensure that they are in line with the current Islamic issues and concerns.
- It is advisable to increase the number of Muslim teachers who possess first-hand knowledge and are more eligible to teach Islamic notions and ideas to children. In addition, more guidebooks should be published to empower non-Muslim teachers on a systematic basis of teaching religion to the children. Teachers of religion should additionally pledge to exercise religious flexibility within the school environment. These convictions reflect the curriculum values of respect and tolerance (AITSL, n.d.) toward families and religious organizations and their transmission of values.
- Having established that textbooks are among the most effective teaching materials in Islamic schools, key stakeholders in the education sector are to equip academic institutions with sufficient books to support teaching and learning. It is necessary to raise academic standards for authors to meet the expected quality standards of being holistic in nature and promote the development of children in

bodily, moral, mental, social and intellectual dimensions. The children must be guided by the content of textbooks to act morally in line with the Islamic faith and uphold the virtues taught. Socially, they must be empowered to relate with others, for example members of the Christian faith. Children need to develop comprehension skills in the modern world that is quickly evolving due to globalization and technological advancement. It is thus a recommendation that textbooks should be designed in a manner that can help them clearly comprehend these affairs.

- To support parents in educating their children about Muslim beliefs, teachers should partner with parents to help and support children to practice what has been taught in schools or out of the school environment. Teachers could train the children on how to pray and read the *Qur'an*. This is to improve the education level of children about Allah beyond the classroom boundaries.
- It is necessary to have professional, comprehensive approach to including diverse stakeholders in the readiness and execution of curricula and in the preparation of educators. If a mandatory program, including education on religions and convictions is not sufficiently objective, endeavors ought to be made to change it and make it more equalised and unbiased. In case this is not conceivable, or cannot be achieved promptly, distinguishing rights may be a palatable answer for parents and students, given that the withdrawal plans are organised in a sensitive and the non-prejudicial way. The individuals who instruct about religions and convictions ought to be satisfactorily well-versed to do so. Such educators need to have the learning, state of mind and aptitudes to instruct about religions and

convictions in a reasonable and adjusted way. Teachers require topic capability as well as pedagogical aptitudes so they can interface with people and assist scholars to cooperate in sensitive and deferential ways.

- It is advisable for the regulating body to introduce new designs of the curricula and other instructive materials about religions and convictions, as well as to consider religious and non-religious matters in a manner that is comprehensive, reasonable and deferential. Forethought should be taken to avoid incorrect or biased material, especially if it fortifies negative stereotypes. Curriculum resources ought to be created using quality to ensure a respectful and rigorous approach to study about religions and convictions. Curriculum implementation might likewise incorporate strategies that give all participating individuals chances to engage and question. Quality curriculum resources can successfully support religious education and development of personal convictions if educators are professionally prepared to use the resources to further improve their own learning and abilities regarding this topic.
- Any strategic planning ought to reflect human rights policy and incorporate knowledge of diverse social and religious qualities. Curriculum resources should focus on facilitating learning about religions, and development of convictions may reflect on worldwide and local issues. Respect for diverse religions should include both majority and minority religions. Such sensitivities will help address the concerns of many people, including parents and other stakeholders in education. There is a developing agreement amongst teachers that learning of religions and convictions is an essential part of a quality education and that it can

cultivate just citizenship, shared admiration, upgrade and uphold religious opportunity, and advertise a comprehension of societal diversity. While choices about matter of confidence must be ensured as individual decisions, no instructive framework can afford to disregard the part of religions and convictions in history and society. Lack of awareness about this issue might fuel bigotry and separation and can expedite the formation of negative stereotypes. More regrettable still, it can infurl hostility, conflict and roughness that have the possibility to debilitate security and a state of stability.

The children in this study had a positive sense of curiosity, wonder, and faith commitment. These dispositions, nurtured within an education system that encourages tolerance and respect for diversity, support the potential for positive individual development and social interaction.

6.3 Suggested areas for further research

This research was focused on children's beliefs and their questions about Allah. Another area of research could be related to other aspects of the Islamic faith, such as Judgement Day. Further research can be made into children's questions and their responses about faith. More research can be done on Islamic textbooks and their effectiveness. This research focused on textbooks relating to Allah and further research may consider other aspects of Islam. Comparisons can also be made of primary and secondary sources. For this study, only one faith-inspired school was used. Further study can use more public and faith-based schools, Islamic and non-Islamic, and make comparisons in relation to religious studies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey about belief in Allah

Are you a girl or a boy? Circle your answer.

Put your age in the box.

This survey is anonymous. No one will read your answers except the person who is doing the research and you must not put your name on it.

1. Do you believe in the existence and oneness of Allah? Circle your answer.

(Quantitative)

All the time Most of the time Sometimes Never

This question was asked to identify the religious need of a child.

2. Write one sentence to explain your answer to question one. (Qualitative)

3. Do you talk about Allah with your parents and friends? Circle your answer.

(Quantitative)

All the time Most of the time Sometimes Never

This question was asked to identify the external factors that influence the extent to which a child develops religiously.

4. If you talk about Allah, write one sentence about what you talk. (Qualitative)

5. When you hear about prayer, fasting, going to the mosque, Allah, the Prophet, Heaven and Hell, do you feel an interest in learning about them? Circle your answer. (Quantitative)

All the time Most of the time Sometimes Never

This question was asked to identify a child's interest in worship and religious topics.

6. How important is the belief in Allah? Circle your answer. (Quantitative)

Very Not very I do not know

This question was asked to measure a child's eagerness to believe in God.

7. Do you want to read the *Qur'an*, learn dua, and pray 5 times a day? Circle your answer. (Quantitative)

All the time Most of the time Sometimes Never

This question was asked to try to identify the child's religious interest from a different aspect.

8. When you were small you could not walk, but Allah created you in such a way that you can walk. Therefore, when you grow older you can start to walk. In the same way, Allah has created us with the belief in Him even before we start believing in Him when we are younger. Therefore, when we get older we can find this belief of Allah inside us and believe in Him. What do you think of this idea? Circle your answer. (Quantitative)

I agree very much I agree I do not know what I think I do not agree

This question was asked to be able to identify the capabilities of religious belief among groups.

9. Write one sentence to explain your answer to question eight. (Qualitative)

10. If you did not hear or were not taught anything about Allah, would you believe that Allah existed and would you search for Him? Circle your answer: (Quantitative)

This question was asked to identify whether a child's belief is influenced by his/her curiosity in exploring religion and whether this is what attracts a child towards Allah.

11. Does everyone need Allah? Circle your answer. (Quantitative)

Yes definitely Yes I don't know No

This question was asked to understand the need for belief.

12. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the name of Allah? Write this in two or three sentences. (Qualitative)

This question was asked to understand how religious concepts are reflected outwards/externally in children.

13. Where do you think Allah is? Write this in one sentence. (Qualitative)

This question was asked to understand how children spatially conceptualize God.

14. Make a sentence from the words below. (Qualitative)

God, create, child/child, God/God, person, child/Hz. Muhammad, God/person, mosque, God.

This question was asked to understand how religious thoughts carry meaning through connotation/association.

15. Does the beauty of nature help you to understand the presence of Allah? Circle your answer. (Quantitative)

Yes definitely **Yes** **I don't know** **No**

This question was asked to identify how religious thoughts are influenced by natural occurrences.

16. If things do not go the way you want in life, do you get angry with Allah and ask why things are not going right for you? Circle your answer. (Quantitative)

Yes definitely **Yes** **I don't know** **No**

This question was asked to identify whether emotional religious doubts are meaningful.

17. Write one sentence to explain your answer to question 14. (Qualitative)

APPENDIX B – 1: LETTER OF INFORMATION TO PARENTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT ALLAH

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR: A/PROF KATH
ENGBRETSON

And/or NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: HUSEYIN ALDEMIR

AND (NAME OF) PROGRAMPROGRAM IN WHICH ENROLLED: Master of Philosophy

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child is invited to participate in a project which is being undertaken as part of Masters of Philosophy project by Mr. Huseyin Aldemir.. The purpose of the project is to explore aspects of Muslim religious education for primary school children.

The students will be asked to complete a questionnaire, which will be administered by their teacher. It will take less than one hour to complete.

Participation in this project is voluntary and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you would like your child to take part in the project, please complete the consent form, sign and return to your child's class teacher.

All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so that your child remains anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ACU premises for five years after the project has concluded and be confidentially destroyed later. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your child's identity will not be revealed.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator/ Supervisor or the Student Researcher

You may be sent a summary of the final report on request.

The Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University has approved this study.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Investigator or Supervisor and Student Researcher has (have) not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit.

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Principal Investigator/Supervisor or Student Researcher.

.....

Principal Investigator/Supervisor

.....

Student Researcher

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR GUARDIAN/PARENT*Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep*

TITLE OF PROJECT: TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT ALLAH

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/SUPERVISOR: A/PROF KATH ENGEBRETSON

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER HUSEYIN ALDEMIR

I..... (The parent/guardian) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity of completing a questionnaire about their belief in God, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time and that my child will not be disadvantaged. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:

(Block letters)

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

NAME OF CHILD:

(Block letters)

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]:

DATE:

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I (The participant aged under 18 years) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the questionnaire, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18:

(Block letters)

SIGNATURE:

Date:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/SUPERVISOR:

Date:

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]:

Date:

APPENDIX D: INFORMATION LETTER TO TEACHERS

TITLE OF PROJECT: TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT ALLAH

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR: A/PROF KATH
ENGBRETSON

And/or NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: HUSEYIN ALDEMIR

AND (NAME OF) PROGRAMPROGRAM IN WHICH ENROLLED: Master of Philosophy.

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a project, which is being undertaken as part of a Master of Philosophy project by Mr Huseyin Aldemir. The purpose of the project is to explore aspects of Muslim religious education for primary school children.

The data collected will be through a student questionnaire, which you are asked to administer. The questionnaire is attached to the letter.

Participation in this project is voluntary, you are free to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time, and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you would like to take part in the project, please complete the consent form, sign and return to Huseyin Aldemir who will forward it to Associate Professor Kath Engebretson who is the principal supervisor.

All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ACU premises for five years after the project has concluded and will then be confidentially destroyed. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your identity will not be revealed.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator/ Supervisor or the Student Researcher.

You may be sent a summary of the final report on request.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Investigator or Supervisor and Student Researcher has (have) not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit.

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form. Retain a copy for records and return the other copy to the Principal Investigator/Supervisor or Student Researcher.

.....

.....

Principal Investigator/Supervisor

Student Researcher

APPENDIX E: TEACHER CONSENT FORM*Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep*

TITLE OF PROJECT: TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT ALLAH

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/SUPERVISOR: A/PROF KATH ENGEBRETSON

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: HUSEYIN ALDEMIR

I (The participant) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this questionnaire to the children in my class whose parents have given permission, realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without affecting my future relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

(Block letters)

SIGNATURE

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/ SUPERVISOR:

DATE

[and, if applicable]

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER

DATE:

APPENDIX F: INFORMATION LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

TITLE OF PROJECT: TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT ALLAH

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR: A/PROF KATH
ENGBRETSON

And/or NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: HUSEYIN ALDEMIR

AND (NAME OF) PROGRAM PROGRAM IN WHICH ENROLLED: Master of Philosophy.

Dear Principal,

You are invited to participate in a project, which is being undertaken as part of a Master of Philosophy project by Mr Husein Aldemir. The purpose of the project is to explore aspects of Muslim religious education for primary school children.

Upon your approval, I would like to approach students from year 4, 5 and 6 via your school and seek their parents' permission to allow their children to participate in the undertaken research project. I also would like to approach several staff members from your school to seek their assistance in administering the project.

There would be minimal inconvenience and interruption to the school and to the staff member

The data collected will be through a student questionnaire, which you are asked to administer. The questionnaire is attached to the letter.

Participation in this project is voluntary and there will be no penalty for doing so. If you would like to take part in the project, please complete the consent form, sign and return to Huseyin Aldemir who will forward it to Associate Professor Kath Engebretson who is the principal supervisor.

All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely on ACU premises for five years after the project has concluded and will then be confidentially destroyed. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your identity will not be revealed.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator/ Supervisor or the Student Researcher

You may be sent a summary of the final report on request.

The Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University has approved this study.

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Investigator or Supervisor and Student Researcher has (have) not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Unit.

VIC: Chair, HREC

C/o Research Services

Australian Catholic University

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Principal Investigator/Supervisor or Student Researcher.

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Principal Investigator/Supervisor

Student Researcher

APPENDIX G: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM*Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep*

TITLE OF PROJECT: TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT ALLAH

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/SUPERVISOR: A/PROF KATH ENGBRETSON

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: HUSEYIN ALDEMIR

I (The participant) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this questionnaire to the children in my classes, which are 4-5-6 whose parents have given permission, realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without affecting my future relationship with the researcher. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

(Block letters)

SIGNATURE

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/ SUPERVISOR:

DATE:

[And, if applicable]

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE: