

Islamic Religious Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Curriculum Analysis Approach

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Abstract: This paper analyses the case of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, examining its historical development and current trends within a unique socio-political and educational framework. By employing a curriculum analysis model, the paper identifies the specific circumstances that have shaped the curricular characteristics of IRE in this country. The findings reveal that IRE in Bosnia and Herzegovina has evolved through a dynamic interplay across various systemic levels, from macro to micro, culminating in a model of education that mirrors the country's political, societal, and educational cultures. It is identified that the most intensive debates were held in the domain of IRE's legal status, parallel to which a professional discourse on didactical arrangements, education programs and textbooks, teacher education and professionalization was carried out, although not in the same intensity.

Keywords: Confessional Religious Education (CRE), Islamic Religious Education (IRE), curriculum analysis, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Beitrag wird der Fall des islamischen Religionsunterrichts (IRU) in Bosnien und Herzegowina analysiert, wobei seine historische Entwicklung und die aktuellen Trends innerhalb eines einzigartigen sozio-politischen und bildungspolitischen Rahmens untersucht werden. Mithilfe eines Modells zur Lehrplananalyse werden die spezifischen Umstände ermittelt, die die Lehrplanmerkmale des Religionsunterrichts in diesem Land geprägt haben. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sich der IRU in Bosnien und Herzegowina durch ein dynamisches Zusammenspiel verschiedener Systemebenen, von der Makro- bis zur Mikroebene, entwickelt hat und in einem Bildungsmodell gipfelt, das die politische, gesellschaftliche und pädagogische Kultur des Landes widerspiegelt. Es wurde festgestellt, dass die intensivsten Debatten im Bereich des rechtlichen Status vom IRU geführt wurden, während parallel dazu ein professioneller Diskurs über didaktische Arrangements, Bildungsprogramme und Schulbücher, Lehrerbildung und Professionalisierung geführt wurde, wenn auch nicht in derselben Intensität.

Schlagwörter: Konfessioneller Religionsunterricht (KRU), Islamischer Religionsunterricht (IRU), Lehrplananalyse, Bosnien und Herzegowina

1. Introduction

Confessional Religious Education (CRE) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is offered as an elective course throughout the elementary school, and in most parts of the country in the secondary school, as well.¹ Once elected, the course becomes obligatory and is included in the overall students' GPA (grade point average). CRE has established itself over three decades as a course widely accepted by parents and students, facilitated by legislation that allows families to opt out of religious instruction or to choose

¹ As will be explained later, education administration in BiH follows the country's structure, which consists of two entities, ten cantons, and one district. Each of these units has jurisdiction over education matters, including the enforcement of laws and curricula, while there is no Ministry of Education at the state level.

the one according to their confession. In Islamic Religious Education (IRE) specifically, there is a relatively stable trend of students' attendance with 80% of them choosing this course throughout their schooling (Pleh, 2022), although alternatives are offered in some parts of the country.

There are research papers highlighting IRE's potential to enhance inter-religious understanding among youth, fostering their ability to maintain distinct identities, active citizenship, and democratic responsibility (Alibašić, 2009; Smajić, 2011), as well as advancing their intercultural skills (Bećirović, 2013; Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, 2023) and accepting diversity (Adilović & Pehlić, 2022), and overall students' personal development and identity formation (Hasanagić & Leto, 2022; Pehlić, Hasanagić & Šarić-Karišik, 2022). However, there are still numerous topics that could be analysed from the perspective of the IRE's contribution, such as its ethical dimension and contribution to nourishing values, as well as didactical arrangements aligned with the digital technologies and students' learning needs (Isanović, 2022) – to mention the most current ones. There is also a need for a comprehensive analysis of the specific developmental path over the past three decades of IRE in public schools. Vejo, Begagić, Adilović, Neimarlija and Durmić (2014) analysed dynamics of changes and expectations in twenty years of IRE in schools identifying 2003 as the milestone in legal positioning of IRE with the passing of the *Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Schooling*, and 2005 as the milestone in terms of reforming the IRE Curriculum and the beginning of a new generation of textbooks. The past decade has seen turbulent changes in the overall education system of the country affected by the release of PISA 2018 results which showed alarming results for Bosnia and Herzegovina (OECD, 2019), as well as COVID-19 crisis and the need for digitalisation in education.

Curriculum analysis model according to the *OECD Future of Education and Skills* document (OECD, 2020) has been applied in this paper. The model encompasses four main levels and corresponding questions which form the structure of this paper:

1. Macrosystem level: what is the broader societal and cultural context in which IRE exists? How is it reflected on education policy related to IRE?
2. Exosystem level: who is in charge for teacher education? What are teachers' qualifications requirements and the level of professionalisation?
3. Mesosystem level: how is IRE integrated in the general curriculum of Bosnia and Herzegovina? How does it contribute to achieving the general values?
4. Microsystem level: how is IRE taught in classrooms in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Analysis was based on the legal framework, literature review, debates held in public and academic sphere, incorporating elements of autoethnography (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010) due to our active participation in the processes from the inception of IRE in BiH. The first section gives an overview of curriculum analysis as a methodology for studying factors and interactions between them shaping specific teaching areas and courses. The second part presents research results segmented according to the levels of the chosen curriculum analysis model. In the concluding remarks an overview of the main achievements and milestones of IRE is given.

2. Curriculum analysis

Curriculum is formed within a specific society, and as such it reflects “a tension between the rationality of the models that define it in theoretical terms and the irrationality of its surrounding society” (Jonnaert & Therriault, 2013, p. 397). Curriculum analysis has transitioned from a primarily structural and evaluative practice to a complex, multidimensional inquiry that integrates diverse educational, cultural, and social factors.

In the most recent curriculum analysis model, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggests an ecological systems approach to curriculum analysis that recognizes the

need to consider the multiple contexts and influences that affect educational arrangements (OECD, 2020). The *E2030 ecosystem approach to curriculum analysis* adopts a holistic perspective by viewing an individual's environment as a series of interconnected, nested systems that influence their development over the lifespan. This approach recognizes that the curriculum is shaped by complex, multidirectional interactions among various stakeholders, including schools, teachers, students, families, the broader community, and society at large. An important element are interactions between the systems which affect one another. The reminder of the text brings the results of analysis taking the OECD model of the curriculum analysis as a framework.

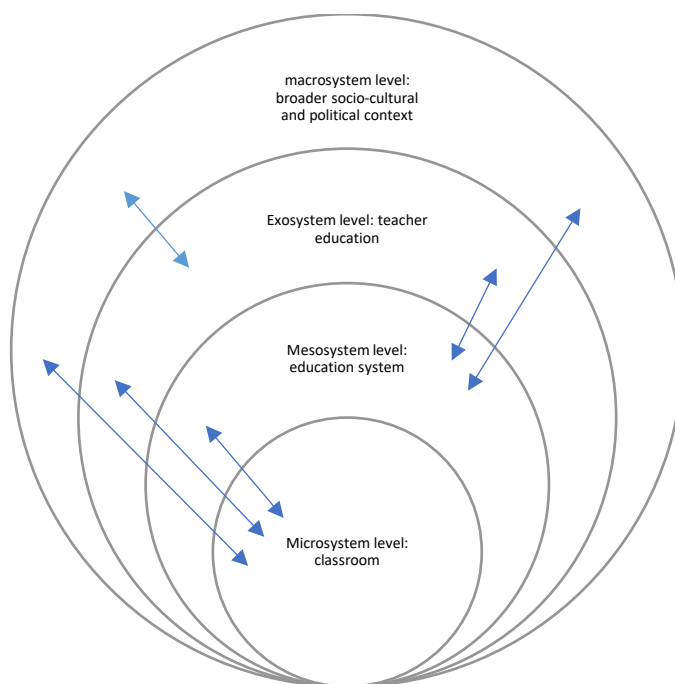


Figure 1: Levels of curriculum analysis and their interconnections (adapted from OECD, 2020)

3. Macrosystem level

Broader societal and cultural context of Bosnia and Herzegovina

BiH officially does not prefer any religion, but also does not explicitly declare itself as secular. However, Article 14 of the *Law on Freedom of Religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Zakon o slobodi vjere i pravnom položaju crkava i vjerskih zajednica [Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities], 2004.) stipulates that religious communities are separate from the state, and that the state must not prefer any religious community, which essentially indicates secularism as the legal model of regulating the relationship between the state and religion. As a result, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina notes in its practice that the principle of secularism is proclaimed by Article 14 of the *Law on Freedom of Religion* (Begović, 2015). The presence of religion in the public domain is generally permitted, while the secular framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina is defined by principles such as “freedom of religion, civil status unrelated to religion, and separation of State from religion” (Karčić, 2015, p. 89). Islamic religious affairs within the state are stringently organized and overseen by the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ICBH), an institution regarded as the paramount Islamic religious authority, led by the Rais al-‘ulama’. The ICBH operates independently in managing its affairs and assets, demonstrating a continuation of the autonomy granted to Islamic institutions in Bosnia since the Ottoman era, forming a core aspect of the Bosniak Islamic tradition (Alibašić, 2015, p. 436).

The ICBH holds the ultimate authority in interpreting Islamic doctrine and norms. It is responsible for the education of imams, religious educators, and other Islamic scholars, providing IRE within both its own institutions and public schools, managing endowments, and more. Like the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, the ICBH receives state funding, which is predominantly allocated for the reconstruction of religious sites, support of religious schools, and funding of religious education within the public education system.

There are two primary models of IRE in Bosnia and Herzegovina: one is conducted within the educational institutions of the ICBH, and the other is organised in public schools. Both models involve cooperation between the ICBH and the education authorities. The former model, deeply rooted in the Ottoman legacy, relies on traditional institutions such as *maktabs*² and *madrastas*³, along with institutions of higher learning (Isanović & Isanović, 2008). Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out among Balkan countries for its long-standing, well-structured, and dynamic system of Islamic education that spans all levels and is officially recognized and validated by the state (Isanović Hadžiomerović, 2018). *Maktabs* and *madrastas* managed to survive the period of rigid Communist regime which held severe restrictions over the public manifestation of religion and even closed down a number of religious and educational institutions. While *madrastas* are institutions of formal education, *maktabs* belong to non-formal education, but both have the goal of imparting religious upbringing and adopting forms of religious practice. *Maktab* instruction is traditionally organised in mosques and for a long time it maintained traditional teaching methods. There are initiatives at innovating and modernizing *maktab* education over the past decade (Svraka, 2021), with the need for a more extensive use of technology and more advanced textbooks, as the most dominant directions.

IRE in education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina

IRE was banned after the Second World War from the public schools due to the rule of Communist regime that did not tolerate religion in the public sphere. Immediately after its collapse, the first initiative at reintroducing CRE in public schools of BiH was made in October 1990 (Omerdić, 2022). The first experimental IRE classes were organised in the school year 1991/1992. Amidst war years (1992–1995), first curricula and textbooks were designed, as well as teachers' education programs were opened in Sarajevo at the Faculty of Islamic Studies and in Zenica at Islamic Pedagogical Academy. In the 1994/1995 school year, IRE has become officially a part of the education system. However, with different status and the level of professional preparation across the country which is due to the overall education system organisation.

Education system in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is characterized by a notably asymmetrical and fragmented administrative structure, encompassing multiple governance models.⁴ The country is composed of two main entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), predominantly inhabited by Bosniaks and Croats, and the Republic of Srpska (RS), with a majority Serb population, in addition to the Brčko District, which displays a diverse national composition. This national composition also

² *Maktab* in BiH is a non-formal religious instruction organized in mosques for school children and is delivered by the *imam* or *muallimah* (female religious teacher). It includes lessons in religious rituals, Quranic script, and reading. Classes are held on weekends and provide a form of socialization within the religious community.

³ *Madrasa* in BiH is a four-year secondary school whose curriculum combines religious disciplines such as *Fiqh*, *Aqaid*, *Hadith*, and *Qiraah* with general courses like Mathematics, Literature, Science, and Technology. *Madrasa* graduates are eligible for enrollment in any higher education program, not just Religious Studies. Its roots lie in the Ottoman *madrasa* system, but the institution has undergone numerous reforms to adapt to the demands of the times.

⁴ Detailed description of the education system in BiH is available from: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/-national-education-systems/bosnia-and-herzegovina/overview> [15.09.2024].

reflects different religious affiliations, whereby Bosniaks incline towards Islam, Croats towards Catholicism and Serbs towards Orthodoxy. The FBiH is further segmented into ten administrative units known as cantons and each of them independently operates its own Ministry of Education and enacts its own educational legislation. The Ministry of Education in FBiH primarily assumes a coordinating role, tasked with developing recommendations and framework legislation within its jurisdiction. In RS, the education administration is centralized under the auspices of its Ministry of Education. Educational matters at the state level are overseen by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, though its function is largely confined to the establishment of framework laws that ensure a baseline of common standards and participation in international agreements and programs such as PISA, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, etc.

The provision for religious education within public educational system is defined by laws on education concerning preschool, primary, and secondary education in RS and the cantons of FBiH;

- *Framework Law on Elementary and Secondary Education in BiH* („The Official Gazette BiH“, No. 16/03)
- *Framework Law on Preschool Education in BiH* („The Official Gazette BiH“, No. 88/07)
- *Law on Primary Education of Republic of Srpska* („The Official Gazette RS“, No. 74/08)
- *Law on Secondary Education of Republic of Srpska* („The Official Gazette RS“, No. 74/08) and laws on primary and secondary education of each of ten cantons.

The *Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, in Article 9, states that students will attend religious education classes only if they are provided in accordance with their beliefs or the beliefs of their parents. The teaching of Islamic religious education is guaranteed in all primary and secondary schools as a compulsory subject for those who choose it, under the same conditions as for all other compulsory subjects.

Additionally, aspects of religious education are addressed in the *Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Status of Churches and Religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Zakon o slobodi vjere i pravnom položaju crkava i vjerskih zajednica [Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities], 2004). Catholic and Orthodox Churches respectively have ratified agreements with the Presidency. The Basic Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Holy See⁵ and the Additional Protocol to the Basic Agreement of August 2007 has the character of an international treaty and was concluded and put into force in accordance with the Law on the Procedure for Concluding and Executing International Agreements. The Basic Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Serbian Orthodox Church⁶ from May 2008 has a foreign element, considering that the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church is in Belgrade.

The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at its 25th session held on September 29, 2015, determined the Draft Basic Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ICBH, and instructed the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina to forward it to the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina for further procedure. However, the agreement between the ICBH and the state has not been yet ratified.⁷ The Draft Basic Agreement guarantees IRE in all public elementary and secondary schools, as well as in preschool institutions, as a compulsory course for those who choose it, under the same conditions as other courses. It is also stipulated that IRE curricula and teaching resources are approved by the ICBH, and the course is taught by teachers who have been granted a decree by the Rais-al-‘ulama’. Additionally, IRE teachers are to be treated as full members of the teaching staff, enjoying the same rights as their peers who teach other school subjects.

⁵ <https://www.bkbih.ba/info.php?id=217> [15.09.2024].

⁶ <https://www.vladars.net/sr-SP-Cyrl/Vlada/Documents> [15.09.2024].

⁷ <http://mhrr.gov.ba/Saopcenja/default.aspx?id=10437&langTag=bs-BA> [10.09.2024].

IRE is taught in primary and secondary schools, and from 2008 it was introduced in public pre-school institutions in some parts of the country (e. g. Sarajevo Canton). Various alternative courses are offered for children and youth that opt from IRE, such as Society/Culture/Religion, Culture of Religions, History of Religions, Ethics, and recently, Healthy Life Styles. While many schools in the FBiH offer an alternative to CRE, such options are notably absent in schools within the RS entity. Analyses indicate that these alternative subjects are often inadequately designed, focusing excessively on cognitive educational goals without sufficient resources or qualified instructors, leading to a general mistrust among students and parents who tend to prefer religious education (Čelebičić, Lepić & Soldo, 2014).

Although the teaching of religious education was reintroduced into educational institutions in the RS entity for the school 1991/1992, this was not the case with IRE, which began only in the 2001/2002 school year, and this process is still not completed, considering the fact that in secondary schools the first classes of IRE were held in 2018 and even in 2020 (Vatreš-Mehmedić, 2022). There are many reasons for this delay, one of the crucial ones is slow return of the Bosniak population who has been forced to flee their homes during the war.

As it can be seen from the analysis, the process of enacting legal regulations on IRE was quite slow, and it took nearly ten years from the introduction of religious education in schools to achieve a quality legal solution at the state level, and several more years for its implementation throughout the country. The adoption of legal provisions on religious education at all levels created the prerequisites for the creation and adoption of new curricula and the development of a new generation of textbooks. These processes were entered with significant ten-year experience in the implementation of religious education, which provided a solid foundation for new quality in both the curriculum and textbooks (Begović, 2022).

4. Exosystem

Teacher education

Over the years, the role of RE in public perception has shifted amid constant questionings of the most suitable model for the Bosnian context. Discussions have tended to focus excessively on the preservation of the confessional RE model, often neglecting crucial aspects such as educational outcomes, professional development for teachers, and the overall quality of instruction.

Parallel to the initiatives for legal positioning of IRE, teacher training programs were designed and even new higher education institutions for this purpose were established in Zenica and Bihać. Teacher competencies were considered the key to success of the IRE, which guaranteed its prevalence and quality. The first pool of teachers were *madrassa* graduates who were in most cases teaching in *maktabs*, after receiving a short training program on school IRE. This made IRE resemble to *maktab* instruction in the early 1990s in terms of traditional methods and the teaching approach, which needed to be adapted to the context of public schools.

The ICBH has been in charge for both pre-service and in-service training of teachers, licensing, and the development of textbooks. Conversely, the state is tasked with authorizing curricula and textbooks in alignment with general educational goals for each level of schooling. Nowadays, IRE teachers hold higher education degrees in Islamic Religious Education, Islamic Pedagogy or Islamic Studies with the requirement of obtaining a licence by the ICBH. Islamic higher institutions educating IRE teachers are located in Sarajevo, Zenica and Bihać. Regular professional development programs are organised for teachers both in subject related and the general pedagogical topics. IRE teachers enjoy equal rights as other employees of the education system and the same employment criteria are applied to all of them. IRE teachers' associations are also active in some parts of the country reflecting an important segment of developing and preserving IRE teachers' specific professional identity.

Teachers of IRE must hold at least a BA degree from one of the three Islamic faculties: The Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo (established in 1977), the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Zenica (established in 1993), or the Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Bihać (established in 1996). These faculties are affiliated with universities in their respective cities, which requires them to align their research and teaching to general university standards and adapt their curricula according to the requirements of the Bologna reform process. These Islamic higher education institutions are established by the ICBH, similar to how the Faculty of Catholic Theology is established by the Catholic Church. The affiliation with universities ensures that they meet standards in quality assurance, curriculum implementation, and faculty promotion.

The Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo is the oldest and most prestigious Islamic higher education institution in Southeastern Europe, offering a three-cycle study program from undergraduate to doctoral levels. It provides three main undergraduate programs: Islamic Theology, Islamic Education and Religious Pedagogy (introduced in 1992), and Training of imams, preachers, and teachers (introduced in 2006). A significant curriculum overhaul in 2014 shifted the focus from a predominantly theological basis to include more general educational subjects.

The Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Zenica, originally a two-year academy founded in 1993 for training IRE teachers, transformed into a faculty in 2004 and joined the University of Zenica. It now offers extended and diverse programs including Social Pedagogy and Pre-School Teacher Education, attracting students of various religious and non-religious backgrounds. This faculty is noted for its innovative approach, particularly in crossing religious boundaries to offer broader educational opportunities.

The Islamic Pedagogical Faculty in Bihać, a member of the University of Bihać since its establishment in 1996, offers programs in IRE and Social Pedagogy and Spiritual Care. Both the Islamic Pedagogical Faculties in Zenica and Bihać operate under a 3+2 system for undergraduate and graduate studies, while the Faculty of Islamic Studies provide a longer, eight-semester undergraduate program.

Despite the significant inclusion of pedagogical and psychological courses across all three faculties, there is a recognized need for further development in IRE as a distinct discipline, incorporating both theological and pedagogical principles. There are also calls at the international level (Tuna, 2021) for more in-service training for IRE teachers to enhance their general teaching skills and familiarity with educational innovations.

According to pertinent legislation governing primary and secondary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, several foundational principles underpin the microsystem of IRE:

- CRE is elective yet becomes mandatory upon selection, aligned with the students' religious beliefs. It becomes compulsory upon being chosen, with assessment conducted under equivalent conditions to other subjects.
- Instruction is delivered by licensed teachers who have completed university-level programs in Religious Education or Islamic Studies and passed state professional examinations.
- IRE teachers enjoy the same employment rights as other teachers and have the same obligations toward continuous professional development which is overseen by the ICBH.
- IRE curricula and textbooks, formulated by the ICBH, require approval from the Ministry of Education.

5. Mesosystem level

Integration of IRE in the general education program in BiH

Education is essentially conceived as transmission of values, with the final goal of forming students' personal identities to live a life conscious of their purpose and possibilities. In the *tawhidic* principle of

Islamic education, learning is not only limited to nourishing cognitive capabilities, but is concerned with nurturing morality, consciousness of dependency on God and the role of His custodian on earth (Zaman & Memon, 2016). The world in which children and youth live nowadays is becoming increasingly ethically disoriented, yet abounding with information and knowledge which often make realities seem more complex, but less comprehensible. This is leading to a *supercomplex* world characterized by fragility “in the way that we understand the world, in the way in which we understand ourselves and in the ways in which we feel secure about acting in the world” (Barnett, 2000, p. 257). A possible way to address this issue is to turn education systems to orientation knowledge (Mittelstrass, 2006), which should be built upon recognized values and bearing in mind a desired purpose.

This raises the question of how school curriculum as a whole and specific courses’ curricula contribute to acquiring orientation knowledge (Mittelstrass, 2006), values that can foster students’ personal identities while cultivating universal values needed across generations and persisting in the futures. This question is possible to address from the perspective of multiple school courses and each of them has its role to play, including what used to be considered as value-neutral areas such as engineering and STEM. However, there are school courses that deal with values defined content and communicate values more directly compared to others. They are mostly in the domain of Humanities and Social Sciences, a part of which is Religious Education. In its very nature, Religious Education is values driven and intends to cultivate values in students. It can be achieved through authentic religious upbringing, where children and youth are immersed in religious practice and are taught to emulate it. But, when religious education becomes curricularised, this transfer and cultivation becomes mediated by curricular means such as content, communication, teachers, their qualities and competencies, as well as wider pedagogical philosophy, and even ideology. Therefore, it is right to ask what values IRE cultivates in school children and youth. In order to answer this question, content analysis of the official IRE Curriculum has been conveyed (Ministry of Education of Zenica-Doboj Canton, 2023).

MORAL VALUES	WORLDVIEW	CULTURAL VALUES	SOCIAL VALUES
Identity formation, Consciousness of the value of life, Wholeness, Integrativity, Responsibility, Accountability, Healthy living, Character formation, Family life, Role models	Consciousness of God’s creation, Life as God’s gift, Human as God’s servant, Belief in destiny, Awareness of God’s attributes, Continuity of prophethood, Integration of Islamic principles in everyday life, Sacrality of time	Aesthetic values, Consciousness of legacy, Beauty as a part of religion, Islamic art, Love for the homeland	Diversity, Peaceful communication, Good human relations, Respect for others, Tolerance, Democracy, Intercultural sensibility, Environmental awareness, Cooperation, Empathy

Table 1: Values contained in IRE curriculum

Based on the qualitative data analysis, four broad values have been identified in the IRE curriculum, and corresponding sets of specific values. It can be seen that social and moral values are the most differentiated. They are universal to all humans regardless of their religious affiliation and permeate the whole school curriculum. Worldview values are directly related to the teaching of Islam and reflect its uniqueness and ethical dimensions. Cultural values are, according to this analysis, the least differentiated and are related to overall aesthetical sensibility, consciousness of own legacy and identity, together

with the sense of patriotic of towards the homeland. It can be concluded that IRE program in Bosnia and Herzegovina intentionally incorporates specific Islamic worldview into nourishing of the universal values thorough the teaching process.

6. Microsystem level

Teaching methods and approaches in IRE

Following the disappointing results of the PISA 2018 assessments, educational authorities have decided to implement a series of measures aimed at modernizing curricula and educational programs. IRE is also following this trend, albeit in accordance with the slow dynamics of change across the entire system. In some parts of the country, documents for IRE curricula based on learning outcomes have already been prepared. At various levels of education management in Bosnia and Herzegovina, curriculum reforms are currently being conducted, which are intended to be based on learning outcomes and incorporate functional knowledge. An analysis of the latest IRE educational program (Ministry of Education of Zenica-Doboj Canton, 2023) shows that it includes recommendations on usage of active learning methods, multimedia and multimethod approaches, verbal and audio-visual methods, practical work, text analysis, simulation, insert, gallery walk, excursions, field work, projects, community actions, learning by discovery. It has been already identified that education process in BiH still relies on memorisation and rote learning (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2012), and that teaching approaches are still content-centred not learner centred. Amid such a context, it is difficult to expect from IRE teachers to offer radically different teaching approaches. However, the question of the overall education experience offered to students is pivotal in maintaining the high attendance rate and the quality of education process, and that should be dealt with more systematic attention.

7. Conclusions

The development of IRE in public schools reflects broader socio-political dynamics and educational policy trends, delineated into four distinct phases:

5. Initial enthusiasm (1990s). Marked by a post-communist religious revival, this phase saw high enrolment in the newly introduced RE, taught by educators with traditional religious training. This period was also characterized by internal debates within the Islamic Community about the necessity of RE in public schools versus traditional religious schools (maktabas).
6. Consolidation (early 2000s). This period focused on enhancing the professional qualifications of IRE teachers, requiring university degrees from recognized Islamic faculties. Educational laws were enacted to affirm the right to religious education, with significant efforts in curriculum and textbook development. The focus was on enhancing the professional qualifications of IRE teachers, requiring university degrees from recognized Islamic faculties. Educational laws were enacted to affirm the right to religious education, with significant efforts in curriculum and textbook development. This era also featured debates about alternative courses for students opting out of confessional religious education, often under the guidance of international organizations like OSCE, UNICEF, and the Open Society Fund.
7. Questioning and debates (mid and late 2000s). Debates over introducing alternative subject and policy changes that excluded RE from contributing to overall GPA triggered certain mistrust and insecurity, which did not make a longer-lasting impact on the IRE's status.
8. Promoting professionalization and research in Religious Education, and improvement of quality assurance (late 2000s); it seems that the locus of endeavour was now moved from the public arena more to the professional and scholarly domain. More and more surveys are conducted on Islamic Religious Education, its impacts and value; professionals working in the public system are educated both in general pedagogical disciplines and Islamic studies. Current textbooks and other

didactic materials are continuously innovated in order to be up-to-date with the recent pedagogical trends. The 'legalistic discourse' of the previous stages tends to be silenced on the account of scholarly and professional accounts on the teaching process, educational outcomes, teacher professionalization, etc.

Curriculum analysis of the IRE in Bosnia and Herzegovina show that previous three decades have been dominated by the discussions on the macrosystemic and exosystemic levels, while in the future much attention should be dedicated to the microsystem level. As achievements in this domain are identifiable, more visible changes on the microlevel are hampered by the overall educational culture that needs a radical reform in order to answer the needs of a modern-day education process, which is globally influenced by digital transformation emergence of artificial intelligence and ethical disorientation. In such an environment, the whole of education system's approach needs to be oriented towards children and youth in order to grant them purpose and orientation, and IRE has its role in this integrative approach.

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