

## Article

# Contribution of Islamic Religious Education to Intercultural Values in Pluralistic European Cultures: Insights from Bosnia and Herzegovina

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**Abstract:** This article aims to highlight how Islamic Religious Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country of rich cultural and religious diversity, promotes and advocates intercultural values of diversity, tolerance, solidarity, peace and dialogue in the context of contribution to intercultural values in pluralistic European cultures. This article also emphasizes the growing need to raise inclusive religious and intercultural awareness. Further, this article provides a content analysis of the BH unified curriculum of confessional Islamic Religious Education (IRE), a subject that is incorporated in all state-maintained schools, as well as the analyses of intercultural values embedded in Islamic higher education programs of the Faculty of Islamic Studies at the University of Sarajevo, which prepares religious education teachers and mu'allims. The purpose of this article is also to review the practices and projects which center around the intercultural and interreligious development of teachers and students through practical experience with intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** Islamic religious education; pluralistic European cultures; intercultural values; Bosnia and Herzegovina; confessional religious education; higher Islamic education



**Citation:** Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, Dina. 2023. Contribution of Islamic Religious Education to Intercultural Values in Pluralistic European Cultures: Insights from Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Religions* 14: 453. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040453>

Academic Editors: Fella Lahmar and Khalid Arar

Received: 7 December 2022

Revised: 19 March 2023

Accepted: 20 March 2023

Published: 28 March 2023



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## 1. Introduction

Educational work in pluralistic European cultures faces numerous challenges and tasks. One of the tasks of education for policymakers and of Islamic Religious Education is to prepare all students and future religious teachers for common life in a democratic society, regardless of their racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic or other differences. Education for intercultural values is not only reflected in the importance of developing the potential of learners through the transmission of knowledge and the creation of competencies, attitudes and universal values that empower them for life in society, but also in a dialogue that is “open and respectful” and that takes place between individuals or groups “with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect” (Council of Europe 2008a, p. 10).

Recent research on intercultural education in representative literature of the last two decades (2000–2019) shows there has been a significant tendency towards different operationalization of intercultural education since 2015, which is not limited to static concepts such as intercultural competence, but has expanded towards learning and dialogue as dynamic and interdependent constructs (Rapanta and Trovão 2021, pp. 21–22).

Through a diverse education, students are able to develop respect for different individuals and societies, and they are empowered to express their beliefs, attitudes and values through practical action. Whether and to what extent these values will be implemented depends significantly on teachers.

The Council of Europe’s policy of inserting interreligious education in the common curriculum is of extraordinary importance, ideally ensuring that teachers not only have non-Eurocentric knowledge but also the skills to teach intercultural elements of the curriculum (Council of Europe 2006). Educators, among other stakeholders, are identified also by the

UNESCO policy as key stakeholders in the Teaching Respect for All project. As education professionals, “teachers have a critical role to play in the transformation process in and through education” (UNESCO 2014, p. 12).

The educational system at all levels has the task of promoting intercultural values, which, in the European context, will contribute to the coexistence of people with different hierarchies of values.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) is a multicultural country rich with ethnic, national, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity. The Bosnian experience of coexistence is in many respects unique in the world. The close and immediate interaction of Muslims, Jews and Christians as well as other denominational traditions in the everyday public life of BH cultivates the spirit of natural and spontaneous coexistence, cultural and civilizational cooperation and communication. However, during and after the war period (1991–1995), BH became a divided country. This resulted in a greater need for interculturalism over time in order to normalize relations between people and start the path not only of recovery but also of peaceful coexistence and progress.

Bearing in mind the above considerations, the intercultural dimension of upbringing and education requires new approaches to educational activities that will enable them to be realized in the community of students, teachers, educators, pedagogues and parents. These approaches must emphasize the influence of state initiatives, religious communities, international organizations, the nongovernmental sector, media, etc., within the field of intercultural education. Religious education remains a factor of great significance that could contribute to the development of intercultural values and coexistence in pluralistic societies.

On this basis, state policies, educational policies and policies of religious communities play an important role in promoting the intercultural dimension of education, both secular and nonsecular. Some BH policies and documents will be briefly highlighted here.

A repeating pattern is seen in which articles demand respect for universal values through analysis of the BH Constitution as the highest legal act. The Constitution (Article II) protects the human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens without discrimination on any grounds (Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina 1995. “Non-Discrimination”, Article II, 4). The same demand for respect is also evident in the BH legal frameworks of education: Bosnia and Herzegovina Framework Law on Higher Education (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2007a, Article II, 4); Bosnia and Herzegovina Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003, Article I, II) and Bosnia and Herzegovina Framework Law on Kindergarten Education (Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2007b, Article I, 4–11).

The Platform of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina for Dialogue (2006) also contains basic guiding principles on issues of religious diversity and coexistence, inter-ethnic and international relations, human rights and violence. It represents a commitment of the Islamic Community to position dialogue as a crucial component of interculturalism, which is compatible with major international organization policies and initiatives (COE, OSCE, UN, etc.). This position of the IC towards intercultural values is reflected in its Islamic educational institutions (madrasahs, higher educational institutions). This is also evident in confessional Islamic Religious Education (IRE), a subject that is prescribed and designed by IC specialists’ teams and taught in state schools.

## 2. Literature Review

Religious education for intercultural values in this part of the paper is briefly presented through three aspects—the intercultural content of the normative sources of Islam, pedagogical views on the religious component in education and its affirmation in relevant international documents.

Normative sources of Islam, the Qur’an and Sunnah, include intercultural values of tolerance, respect for others, dialogue, etc. Humanity is created to cultivate their differences and to “may know one another”. Such an idea is repeated in some places in the Qur’an:

O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you. God is All-knowing, All-aware. (Qur'an, Al-Hujurat/The Apartments: 13; translated by A. J. Arberry)

The Qur'an addresses Jews and Christians as Ahl Al-Kitab—People of the Book (Al-Baqara: 285), describing some of them as believers (al-mu'minin) (Ali 'Imran: 110) and righteous (al-salihun) (Ali 'Imran: 110). Additionally, the Qur'an admits the Holy Books revealed before the Qur'an (Ali 'Imran: 84). Belief in the truth of previously revealed religions is a necessary condition for believing in and witnessing to Islam. Faruqi and Faruqi (1986, p. 191) point out that this attitude towards other sacred books is not just a polite treatment but an acknowledgment of religious truth.

These intercultural values were reflected in early Muslim history, which should serve as a model of living in all historical and social eras. The Islamic culture of peaceful coexistence and the early practice of Muslim pluralism at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h., was reflected in the Medina Constitution: a contract signed by Muslims and non-Muslims who lived together in Medina and were full citizens of the then-Islamic state. İhsanoğlu (2004, p. 30) explains that paragraph 25 of the Constitution recognizes the religious, legal and cultural autonomy of citizens. With this practice and through numerous other examples, Muhammad, p.b.u.h., set early examples of pluralism. The teachings of Muhammad, p.b.u.h., are clear confirmation of the presence of interculturalism in Islamic sources. According to his teachings, all people are equal, regardless of race, nation, language, skin color, etc.

Islam, like other monotheistic religions, promotes universal human values through its teachings about God's commandments. Universal values are essentially unchanging and must not depend on social, economic or political changes. These are fundamental for every human community, and, in addition to these universal values, religions nurture and educate their own special values. On these foundations, Islamic religious education should develop learning that is able to foster the differences that exist in society and improve human social morals.

In pedagogy perception, religious education plays a special role in promoting universal moral values and therefore intercultural values. It supports the holistic notion of "human nature". Bosnian pedagogue and sociologist Slatina (2005, p. 12) proposes that pedagogical norms and goals of education should be based on objectively valid/universal values: Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Justice and Holiness. These values are the spiritual mirror of man. In his theory of confluent education, Slatina explains that these values should not be relativized. If universal values are relativized, i.e., if there is nothing sacred in educational goods, then educational practice, even outside of our will, begins to function according to the principle: "everything has a price, nothing has value".

It is important to point out that values and their education cannot only be a private matters, but necessarily have their own social dimension. Religious education is directed towards the realization of human potential in all areas and dimensions of personality, supporting the notion of "human nature". Education should support the complete growth and development of personality. Therefore, certain aspects of the human being such as intellectual, moral, aesthetic, physical and work-related education cannot be developed alone in the scope of educational activities. Man's wholeness and uniqueness are completed by religious upbringing. Religious upbringing gives us attributes that complete our worldviews and our consciousnesses and are the means by which man gets to know himself. These attributes are the starting points and origins of education for values that transcend any particularities of culture. Therefore, learning to know, to do, to live, to be, to value and to believe are not mutually exclusive, regardless of their particular ascending lines of development (Slatina 2016, p. 31).

The religious component of intercultural education in terms of promoting such values has also been recognized by numerous international institutions. Some of them will be presented here. The UN, UNESCO and Council of Europe directives for convergence argue

that we should guarantee the provision of education that respects the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and that all discrimination based on beliefs should be eradicated, in line with the UN Charter (Vilà et al. 2020, p. 257).

The basis for most international documents on education can be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, striving to ensure intercultural values. The United Nations (UN) adopted a number of other documents that seek to direct education policies to promote intercultural values and the religious dimension of intercultural education. For instance, in the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (United Nations 1981), Article 5 (para. 3) treats interculturalism in the religious field education as such: “The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of religion or belief of others, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.”

One of the more important factors in recognizing the religious dimension of intercultural education as a formal policy was the Council of Europe. For this purpose, the Council adopted several important documents and recommendations. With the adoption by the Assembly in 1993 of Recommendation 1202 (Council of Europe 1993), “Religion tolerance in a democratic society”, the Council of Europe had already dedicated itself to opening a dialogue based on the equal dignity of Europe’s various cultures and religions. Among the documents are: Recommendation 1720 (2005) on “Education and religion” (Council of Europe 2005); Recommendation 1804 (2007) on “State, religion, secularity and human rights” (Council of Europe 2007) and Recommendation 245 (Council of Europe, The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities 2008) on “Intercultural and interreligious dialogue: an opportunity for local democracy.” Among the projects and initiatives of the Council of Europe was a project named “The new challenge of intercultural education: religious diversity and dialogue in Europe 2002–2006”, which looked at the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. Another project was “Teaching religious and convictional facts—A tool for acquiring knowledge about religions and beliefs in education; a contribution to education for democratic citizenship, human rights and intercultural dialogue” (Council of Europe 2008b, DGIV). A conference on “The religious dimension of intercultural education” was held in Oslo (Norway) in 2004, which resulted in the publication of the book “Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools” in 2007. International documents emphasize tolerance,<sup>1</sup> respect, friendship, understanding, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Many international documents refer to the curriculum to implement intercultural and human rights education. Some documents refer explicitly to organizational and school climates. However, it is the responsibility of professional educators to give concrete form to these recommendations (Batelaan and Coomans 1999, pp. 19–20).

Considering the above-elaborated components of religious education in an intercultural context, it seems important to analyze official discourses of Islamic Religious Education on intercultural values in curricula and its implementation and operationalization in practice. In the following sections, this article highlights the position of Islamic education in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of intercultural values.

### 3. Methodology

The purpose of this work is to investigate the official theoretical and conceptual discourses of BH Islamic Religious Education regarding intercultural values in school curricula. This work also aims to examine the actual implementation and operationalization of these values in practice through inclusive intercultural and interreligious projects, practices and dialogue activities as a dynamic component of intercultural education.

This paper presents a two-part analysis of intercultural values within the framework of Islamic Education in BH at different educational levels (primary, secondary and higher

education). The first part examines intercultural values in the curricula of confessional Islamic Religious Education (IRE), a subject that is studied in BH state-maintained schools. The main objects of research were primary school (nine grades) and high school (four grades) Islamic Religious Education curricula, which are unified in the Bosnian context.

In the second part, analyses encompass intercultural values embedded in the curriculum of the Islamic higher education program of study: “Islamic Religious Education/Pedagogy” of the University of Sarajevo’s Faculty of Islamic Studies (FIS). The program is the oldest in BH, preparing teachers of IRE, religious educators and mu’allims.

The curricular and extracurricular collaborative intercultural projects and activities related to confessional IRE in schools and to the above-mentioned study program of FIS aim to develop the intercultural and interreligious competencies of religious teachers and students and provide them with practical experience with intercultural dialogue. To review these projects, various textual data across multiple sources were analyzed. The data were mostly obtained through the archive of the Faculty of Islamic Studies and its webpage, educational departments of the Islamic Community and the Ministry of Education, relevant journals, magazines, media reports, NGO webpages and interviews with IRE teachers of primary and secondary schools obtained through focus groups.<sup>2</sup>

The key analytical question in this work is to understand in what ways IRE in BH at the level of primary, secondary and higher education contributes to the promotion and development of intercultural values in domestic and wider contexts. In order to clarify the answer to this research question, our task was to identify key elements in curricula, projects and activities that encourage understanding, acceptance, respect and coexistence of members of different religious and cultural backgrounds, and to determine whether the curricula include elements that have a negative impact on intercultural education and stereotypical representations.

A qualitative content analysis method (Mayring 2014) was used to investigate the content of official curricula and intercultural and interreligious collaborative projects and activities. This method enabled analysis at the level of selected curriculum elements (curriculum goals, expected outcomes, thematic and teaching units and literature) and intercultural projects and activities. Certain categories referred to in the analysis were generated by drawing from previously presented sources in the literature review that discuss concepts of intercultural education defined in international documents, literature on intercultural education, Islamic literature and BH policies on education. Some categories are as follows: understanding multiculturalism as a value in contemporary globalization trends; building relationships with those who are differently imbued with love, appreciation, respect and tolerance; values of common life; diversity as wealth and a sign of God’s grace; valuing and preserving the cultural heritage of the homeland, state, European and world cultural heritage; universal religious values; giving value to other religions, emphasizing the continuity of faith; solidarity towards members of other beliefs; dialogue as a dynamic component of intercultural education and as a feature of Islam; promotion of peace and elimination of violence and values of human rights, freedom, diversity and humanity.

Criteria for content analysis included content that explicitly articulates intercultural values. Through the analysis of the Islamic CRE school curriculum, closely related intercultural values were grouped around defined categories. In the curriculum of the Islamic higher education study program “Islamic Religious Education/Pedagogy”, identified intercultural values in selected curriculum elements were grouped around courses at the bachelor, master and doctoral levels: Linguistic, Pedagogical, Theological and Islamic Culture and Civilization. An analysis related to identified collaborative and participatory intercultural projects, interreligious projects and educational activities (educational seminars and workshops, dialogue groups, etc.) focused mostly on exploring themes, participants and characteristics and examined how the intercultural values within the IRE curriculum are positioned in the context of practical implementation.

#### 4. Confessional Islamic Religious Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina Public Educational System and Intercultural Context

##### 4.1. *The Status and Goals of Confessional Islamic Religious Education from 1992 until Today*

Institutional Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina began with the Ottoman presence starting in the mid-15th century. It continued to have considerable space in Bosnian public schools during Austro-Hungarian rule and later during the Yugoslavian Monarchy until the end of World War II. However, with the arrival of the Communist regime, religion and religious affairs largely lost their previously public status (Kasumović 1999, p. 95).

The fall of the communist regime contributed to the intensification of discussions on religious education in state-maintained schools. Advocates argued that the ability to teach and learn religion is a fundamental human right. They defended the existence of CRE in schools as a kind of corrective justice after decades of religious oppression. At a meeting with religious teachers in Srebrenica in 2009, former Grand Mufti of the Islamic Community in BH, Dr Mustafa Cerić, emphasized that “through gradual education on religion, we will avoid the religious extremism facing the world today” (Alibašić 2009, p. 26). Alibašić (2009) stated that:

Coexistence based on the suppression of individual identities during the Communist era failed in BH, despite 45 years of concerted efforts. Only authentic pluralism and multiculturalism that simultaneously affirms individual identities and patriotism through promotion of BH supraidentity can succeed.

(Alibašić 2009, p. 25)

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the post-war time (1992–1995) demanded social coexistence to be built or rebuilt. The apparatuses that were used to forge and reforge coexistence included the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue through state initiatives, religious communities, international organizations, and within the educational system itself. The key reason for the wide discussions on religious education in the public educational system was to promote tolerance, understanding and peaceful coexistence of members of different (non)religious beliefs.

The first steps towards the introduction of Confessional Religious Education (CRE) in state schools were taken in the wake of the first multiparty elections, when CRE was implemented in the 1991–1992 school year in some Bosnia and Herzegovina public schools as a pilot project. In 1994, the Bosnian Ministry of Education introduced CRE in primary and secondary schools as an elective subject, thus establishing five separate religious curricula: Islamic, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and Adventist. Under this arrangement, religious communities drew up their own curricula and prepared their own textbooks, which were subject to the approval of the Ministry. Religious communities also continued to issue certificates for CRE teachers confirming their qualifications and suitability for teaching. These certified teachers were then paid for by the state (Alibašić 2009, p. 17).

CRE is now regulated by the 2004 Law on Freedom of Religion and Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is also the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education, which applies to the entirety of the country, as well as specific laws on education in all cantons. In the current system, state schools must offer religious education to students who belong to their respective tradition based on a normative theology and confessional approach. As an elective, religious education is not compulsory, but it is equal in grade value to other subjects of the school curriculum. Some other school subjects were introduced as an alternative to CRE with variations throughout BH. For example, courses on religious cultures as well as courses on society, culture, religion and healthy lifestyles are offered in the capital city of Sarajevo. The current model of confessional religious education enjoys a very high approval rate. For example, a report from Sarajevo reveals that about 85–90% of pupils attending CRE between the school years 2014–2019 showed an increasing trend in attendance of Islamic

Religious Education classes (Report on the number of pupils attending CRE in school years 2014–15–2018–19, Sarajevo Canton, Pedagogy Institute of the Ministry of Education).

The above-mentioned Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Article 3 emphasizes that the general goals of education derive from the generally accepted universal values of a democratic society and the values of the peoples living in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003). The educational authorities opted for a society of knowledge, humanity and values, and recognized the importance of a well-grounded education system in the country's efforts to join the European Union.

According to the Curriculum of the Confessional Islamic Religious Education course, the subject upholds the general educational goals of a democratic school. Its purpose is to promote a complete and systematic education of a person in a complementary way with other school subjects on principles of correlational–integrative learning in order to prepare young people to become conscious and responsible citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina's pluralistic society and in a European context.

#### *4.2. Affirmation of Intercultural Values through Islamic Religious Education in the Public Education System of Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in public schools follows theological and anthropological–pedagogical foundations of education to introduce Islam to pupils. The analysis of the general goals, objectives, contents, and intended learning outcomes of the course curricula for primary and secondary schools clearly indicates that the subject of Islamic Religious Education affirms Islamic values and places a strong emphasis on education for intercultural perspectives. Some of the objectives listed in the curriculum include affirming positive interpersonal values, coexistence, tolerance and cooperation. Students are encouraged to live healthy lives based on the teachings of Islam and are raised in the spirit of patriotism and the need for a common life based on the historical, cultural and religious determinants of BH. Through the curriculum, students ideally develop awareness of the connections between the traditional and the modern, the spiritual and the material and the ethnic and the multicultural in BH and in the European environment. These objectives help contribute to a better understanding of students' identities and improve their awareness of the importance of the fundamental postulates of intercultural education. (Confessional Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019, 2020, p. 3).

Through thematic and teaching units, the IRE curriculum for nine-year primary schools affirms various intercultural and interreligious values. The curriculum seeks to foster lifelong dedication to intercultural values from an early age, which can also be seen in the numerous thematic and teaching units presented in the following section and grouped by category.

##### *4.2.1. Affirmation of Intercultural Values through IRE Curriculum*

The Islamic Religious Education Curriculum promotes:

- Understanding multiculturalism as a value in contemporary globalization trends and building relationships imbued with love, appreciation, respect, solidarity, tolerance and dialogue with all people, especially with others and those who are different. These values are reflected through thematic units such as: My behavior—"Good child" (1st grade); "Relation to man—Allah's most chosen creation", "Respect for the Other" (2nd grade) and "Caring for a neighbor, respect to the members of other religions" (2nd grade); I behave Islamic—"Let's respect and tolerate others" (3rd grade) and "Faith teaches us to respect others" (5th grade);
- Values of common life—"Me and others together"; "Respect and good relations" (6th grade) and Life in community—"A believer wants the same for others as he wants for himself" (7th grade);
- The understanding that one's relationship towards others is also understood as part of belief, as an expression of love for God, as a source of positive emotions and

one's own happiness. The following thematic and teaching units align with this core value: For the love of God—"Unity and equality" (7th grade) and The search for happiness—"Religious tolerance" (9th grade);

- Seeing diversity as wealth and a sign of God's grace: Diversity of the world—"Wealth and diversity of languages" (4th grade) and "Diversity among people as a sign of God's grace", "The value of human life" (4th grade);
- Valuing and preserving the cultural heritage of the homeland, state, European and world cultural heritage through developing a sense of belonging to Bosnia and Herzegovina. These lessons support elaborated values: Journey through Bosnia and Herzegovina—"My homeland Bosnia and Herzegovina", "Bosnia and Herzegovina—a country of rich diversity" (3rd grade); "Tradition, culture and coexistence in Bosnia and Herzegovina", "My contribution to protecting the homeland" (4th grade); Our homeland and identity—"Bosnian encounter with Islam" and "Ahdnama—Bosnian freedom map" (9th grade);
- Universal religious values, giving value to other religions and emphasizing the continuity of faith. Through the IRE curriculum, students are sensitized to the recognition of universal religious values and the understanding of different ways of expressing faith, prayers, holidays, traditions and so on. This education is facilitated through numerous thematic and teaching units: God's Messengers before Muhammad—"God's Messengers—teachers of their nations" (3rd grade); "Revelations are a grace to people" (5th grade); Faith in human life—"Faith ennobles us", "Continuity of belief", "Messengers of God", "Living with differences" (6th grade); My prayer to God—"Different forms of prayer", "Occasions in which I address God", "Places of praise and glorification of the Creator" (6th grade); Diversity in my neighborhood—"Homeland is built with love", "Catholic and Orthodox holidays", "Jewish holidays", "Holidays of members of other beliefs" (5th grade) and I learn from others—"Wisdom in judgment", "The melody and messages of the Psalms", "The graces of God bring us closer to God", "Refreshing understanding through the Bible and the Gospels" (8th grade);
- Encouraging solidarity towards members of other beliefs and recognition of the contribution of non-Muslims in the protection of Muslims at the time of Muhammad, p.b.u.h.: From the life of Muhammad—"Christians have encouraged and supported Muslims". This topic discusses the solidarity of the Christian king Negus in Abyssinia who kindly received a group of Muslim refugees from Mecca persecuted by mushriks (polytheists), giving them full freedom to practice their religion (5th grade).

Furthermore, the Islamic Religious Education builds intercultural competencies and encourages students within the secondary school curriculum to examine interpersonal relationships, homeland, place and role in the European Union:

- Islamic Religious Education emphasizes dialogue as a dynamic component of intercultural education and as a feature of Islam. This emphasis can be observed in the following teaching units: Islam and the culture of dialogue—"Islam the faith of dialogue" (1st grade, secondary school) and History of Islam—"The meeting of Islam with other cultures" (3rd grade, secondary school);
- Islamic Religious Education promotes peace and elimination of violence. Students learn about people's mutual relations and people's relations to the world, as well as issues related to achieving fair and peaceful interpersonal and social relations: "Violence, Injustice, War and Terrorism" (4th grade, secondary school);
- There are no stereotypes regarding religions, women or minorities within the curriculum. For instance, the topic "Women in Islam" promotes the idea that women are the honor of the Muslim community and more broadly humankind.

#### 4.2.2. Inclusive Intercultural Practices and Projects within IRE

The goal of this section is to examine how the above intercultural values within the IRE curriculum are positioned in the context of practical implementation through projects and practices related to IRE:

- Intercultural values are fostered through Professional Development of IRE Teachers. Professional Development of IRE Teachers through annual mandatory and supplementary seminars included interreligious and intercultural themes in programs. The Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo periodically organized seminars following the Memorandum on cooperation between the Ministry of Education in Sarajevo and the Faculty. Some related topics for professional development of teachers presented by different specialists, practitioners and representatives of NGOs included: Presentation of the lesson Respect and Good Relations as part of Education for Peace project (2011); Religious Education and Culture/s; Peace Education and Religious Education; Workshop on Conflict Resolution; How to Talk About Religion to Young People and Inclusive Education as a way of overcoming prejudice and social distance. (Data from the Pedagogy Institute of the Ministry of Education in Sarajevo and the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo.);
- Affirmation of interreligious and intercultural dialogue through joint programs and educational projects in schools.

Some educational projects are presented here:

*“A Global Ethic in a School: Integrating a Global Ethic into Educational Structures and Processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina”*

This project was implemented in different BH cities with the partnership of The Global Ethic Foundation from Tübingen, Germany ([Pedagogy Institute of the Tuzla Canton 2015](#)).

*“Interreligious Teacher’s Meeting in Bosnia and Herzegovina”*

Several annual meetings were held beginning in 2013. The first was organized by the Interreligious Council in BH, while the others were organized by the Catholic Church, the Serb Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community in BH ([Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016](#)).

*“Dialogue Groups of CRE Teachers and Pupils in Classrooms and in a Community”*

The experiences of religious teachers reflected through focus groups showed that the most common forms of intercultural and interreligious educational activities are dialogue groups in classrooms, interreligious meeting projects in a community and visits to the places of worship of other religious communities. To illustrate, some statements obtained from religious teachers<sup>3</sup> through interview within focus groups are given here:

*As an Islamic religious teacher who has worked in several schools over the course of 25 years, I have rich experience in dialogue and interreligious projects. One of the projects is the workshop for parents on “The Richness of Diversity”, which was co-organized by a teacher of Orthodox religion and me. At the workshop, along with the dialogical conversation, we participated in holiday festivities such as exchanging holiday recipes, painting Christmas eggs, and preparing Eid packages. The goal was to strengthen parents’ and students’ intercultural and interreligious competences, as well as our own. The second co-teaching project alongside a teacher of another religious tradition involved exploring intercultural topics with our students. With the help of a teacher who instructs a non-confessional alternative subject, “Society, Culture, Religion”, I organized dialogic meetings among students through various extracurricular activities, such as visits to religious buildings (mosques, churches, cathedrals, and synagogues). Dialogue between students of different religious affiliations and non-religious students attending both the alternative subject and IRE resulted in a rich reflection of personal experiences and appreciation of diversity.*

(EF, IRE teacher at M. M. Bašeskija Primary School, Sarajevo)

*My teaching of Islamic Religious Education is recognized by the fact that some students of other religions, as well as students who are children of mixed marriages, voluntarily come to IRE classes even though they are not formally enrolled. They attend IRE classes either out of curiosity, or the need to learn more about Islam in general, be that Islamic values or the view of interpersonal relations. Of course, these students are not graded within IRE classes. The most important thing is communication, respect, and dialogue*

*in these situations. Within the framework of certain topics that are represented in the curriculum of Islamic Religious Education, we visit religious buildings of other religious traditions (churches, cathedrals, synagogues) together with the History teacher from our school and in cooperation with representatives of religious communities.*

*(ED., IRE teacher at Medical High School Jezero and High School of Transport and Communications, Sarajevo)*

Dialogue groups provide a space for conversations or activities with students and teachers from different religions and traditions. Personal experiences of real, living diversity bring the value of experiential learning, through which these experiences become more valuable and easier to internalize in each person's life. The following statement by a religious teacher clearly describes some outcomes of dialogue groups in the classroom:

*In Islamic Religious Education classes, when we cover intercultural and interreligious topics, I invite students and teachers of other religions from our school to our dialogical classes. We talk about celebrating religious holidays with various cultures, customs, traditions, and experiences within our families and communities. This dialogue in the classroom between students and teachers of different religious traditions and cultures within IRE classes deepens and refines our relationships, develops our ability to interact sensitively and competently.*

*(SH., IRE teacher at Alija Nametak Primary School, Sarajevo)*

One such dialogic project is "Interreligious Educational Youth Meetings", which delves into topics of diversity promoted within the framework of USAID's "Pro-Future" project. Workshops, led by religious teachers, were held on the very topical process of post-war reconciliation for about 100 elementary and high school students (Tuzla Press 2021). Students' interreligious meetings also take place through various projects within the framework of religious education, projects of the BH Interreligious Council, the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organizations. One example is the educational project "Interreligious Dialogue Through Art" (TPO Foundation 2017). "Visits to a Place of Worship" close to the school with students accompanied by an informative talk is a project within IRE that is frequently implemented by teachers in cooperation with various religious communities.

## **5. Higher Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Intercultural Context**

### *5.1. Development of Higher Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina—Background*

Before analyzing the Islamic Religious Education/Pedagogy programs at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Fakultet islamskih nauka) of the University of Sarajevo, it is important to first provide a brief background on the development of Higher Islamic Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Higher Islamic Education is rooted in the time of Ottoman rule over Bosnia and Herzegovina (1384–1878). With the exception of Gazi Husrev-bey Madrasa in Sarajevo (established in 1537), which had a program and structure of higher Islamic education, there were no Bosnian institutions that could provide comparable instruction (Kasumović 1999).

The new Austro-Hungarian occupation beginning in 1878 demanded policy changes regarding religious education. Because of the persistent need for qualified personnel to run Shariah courts in Bosnia, the Shariah Judges School was established in Sarajevo in 1887. The school was closed and transformed into the Higher Islamic Shariah Theology School (VIŠT) in 1937. The closure of this Higher Educational Islamic institution in 1945, which was the only one in former Yugoslavia, was a great cultural and civilizational loss for Muslims (Sijamhodžić-Nadarević 2011, pp. 94–95). Between 1945 and 1977, Bosnia and Herzegovina was without an Islamic higher educational institution. Studies were sought out and obtained mostly in Egypt and Turkey during this period. Thirty-two years after the closure of VIŠT, in 1977, the Faculty of Islamic Studies was founded in Sarajevo as the Islamic Theological Faculty. During the Bosnian War (1992–1995), additional new Islamic institutions of higher education were founded throughout the country.

There are three departments at the FIS: The Department for Islamic Theology (est. 1977), the Department for Islamic Religious Education/Pedagogy (est. 1992), and the Department for Training Imams, Hatibs and Mu'allims (est. 2005). Since the academic year of 1994–1995, the Faculty has also offered graduate programs. In the 2002–2003 academic year, a thorough reform of the entire system of undergraduate studies was conducted, which included the introduction of the Bologna system. The Faculty is part of the interdisciplinary Master's program entitled "Interreligious Studies and Peace Building", organized in 2017 by Bosnia and Herzegovina's Faculty of Islamic Sciences and Catholic Theological Faculty at the University of Sarajevo, and the Orthodox Theological Faculty (Sveti Vasilije Ostroški) at Foča University in East Sarajevo. This initiative seeks to contribute to peace and reconciliation among the region's wider population. "Islam in Europe", a program offered within the Master's program (est. 2022), is designed to offer students a broad overview of the key themes in Islamic theology and jurisprudence within contemporary European societies.

### *5.2. Religious Teacher Education at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Sarajevo University) and Affirmation of Intercultural Values*

Religious educational training at the university level grants future teachers the potential to develop cognitive and affective learning regarding intercultural values, a highly important aspect of religious education. These teachers can then help students foster mutual understanding, acceptance, tolerance and intercultural and interreligious dialogue in a domestic and European context. Bearing in mind that many graduates of the Faculty of Islamic Studies work as mu'allims and religious teachers in schools in BH and Western European countries, the existing curriculum and courses of the study program in Islamic Religious Education/Pedagogy of the Faculty were of interest for the analysis.

In the case of Islamic Religious Teacher Education, it is possible to differentiate at least four modalities through which attention to intercultural values are included:

1. *Integration of intercultural values in the curriculum:* Intercultural competencies intended to be developed through the content of various courses of the curriculum;
2. *Collaborative and participatory projects:* Participation in collaborative projects that favor the acquisition of intercultural competencies;
3. *Educational seminars and workshops* related to intercultural education;
4. *Dialogue groups* hosted by the Faculty.

#### *5.2.1. Integration of Intercultural Values in the Curriculum*

The content identified in this section is intended to foster the intercultural competencies of students as future religious teachers. It should be noted that the content as a theoretical foundation is considered as important as the teaching and learning process and practical implementation of intercultural dimensions.

The Islamic Religious Education/Pedagogy study program at the FIS is offered at three levels—bachelor, master and doctoral. The program seeks, among other things, to train students for competent dialogue with people of different ideological, religious and cultural traditions. Among outcomes of the study program that are mentioned in the curriculum, there are several promoted intercultural values. Students will ideally be able to "develop quality communication with others, work in teams and accept other people's differences; demonstrate the ability to understand and communicate in foreign languages (Arabic and English as mandatory); perform various cultural, educational and social activities that include humanities education" ([Faculty of Islamic Studies of the Sarajevo University 2020](#)). Below is a list and explanation of some of the courses that promote intercultural and interreligious values.

*Linguistic aspects of intercultural education and promotion of intercultural values (Arabic, English and German)*

The aims of plurilingual and intercultural education, proposed to the European states as a response to the growing plurality of our societies, have been defined in numerous Council of Europe documents ([Council of Europe 2010](#)). Therefore, within this study

program, significant attention is focused on learning foreign languages and promoting intercultural values. Arabic and English are compulsory courses and are taught within four semesters. Students also have the option of taking German as an elective. In addition to BH professors, native speakers (lecturers) are hired to teach foreign languages. Many Arabic language lecturers at the Faculty come from Egypt, while lecturers for English language classes are from the USA as part of the Fulbright program (Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship). Lecturers for German teach in the summer semester with the cooperation of the Institute of Germanistic Studies in Vienna, Austria. With native speakers, students can learn about the cultures, education, customs and traditions of certain European, American and Islamic countries.

*Pedagogy courses and intercultural values*

The *General Pedagogy course* (2nd year of study) affirms intercultural values through intended learning outcomes, teaching topics and literature. One of the topics within the course is “Culture-Education-Personality Relationship (sociocultural roots of education and models of cultural learning, patterns of cultural behavior and parenting styles)” in which students question different cultures and their impact on child upbringing. The idea of interculturality and interreligious education is also represented in this course through the reading materials: Perotti, A. (1995): *Intercultural Education*. Educa, Zagreb and Pranjić, M. (1996): *Religious Pedagogy*. Salesian Catechetical Center, Zagreb.

Although the focus of the *Religious Pedagogy course* (3rd year of study) is on the Muslim perspective of education, this course comparatively analyzes perspectives and views on education and religious pedagogy in monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

Intercultural values are also affirmed through Master’s and Doctoral courses. One of the thematic units of the MA course *Curriculum and Textbook Development in Religious Education* is: “Comparative Analysis of Religious Education Textbooks in BH, Europe and Muslim Countries (sample)”. One of the doctoral teaching topics of the course *Contemporary Issues of Religious Education* promotes the values of human rights, freedom, diversity and humanity.

*Theological courses in promoting intercultural values and interreligious dialogue*

The *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (2nd year) course is about religion in general. Some of the topics covered in this course are “Common Dimensions of Religion”, “Cultural and Social Expressions of Religion (clothing, housing, nutrition)” and “Religions and the Experience of Dialogue”. Interreligious dialogue is also emphasized in this course through the mandatory reading of Adnan Silajdžić’s “Interreligious Dialogue in the Face of the Challenges of the Modern World”, Forum Bosna, Sarajevo (7–8/2010).

Two of the goals of the course *Introduction to Shariah Law* (1st year of study) include elaborating the development of Islamic legal science and practice, as well as acquainting students with the development of numerous cultures, peoples and regions within the context of Sharia Law.

The *Religion and Law (elective)*—course analyzes key components of the normative core of the right to freedom of religion (belief, religious speech, etc.) using case studies as examples from the practice of domestic and international courts.

The *Philosophy of Culture* (elective) course follows thematic units interconnected with intercultural values: “Introduction to the Philosophy of Culture”, “Interdisciplinary Nature of Philosophy of Culture” and “Understanding the Concepts of Cultures and Civilizations”.

The course, *Contemporary Religious Movements* (elective course) introduces students to the basic characteristics of the new (changed) religiosity, forms of alternative religiosity and the characteristics of the activities and teachings of new religious movements.

The *Teaching Judaism and Christianity* (elective) course enables students to acquire basic knowledge in the field of comparative study of the traditions of Judaism and Christianity and their respective spiritual institutions.

*Group of courses on Islamic Culture and Civilization and intercultural values*

The group of courses on Islamic Culture and Civilization also promotes the cultivation of intercultural values in students who are preparing to be religious teachers. This group includes:

*Introduction to the Study of Islamic Civilization* (2nd year of study): Three thematic units incorporate intercultural values: “The Place of Islamic Civilization among World Civilizations”, “Muslim World and the West: A History of Encounters” and “Muslim and Western Contribution to World Civilization”.

*History of Islamic Civilization until 1700 and History of Islamic Civilization after 1700* (3rd year of study): Within these courses, students have an opportunity to learn about the intertwined nature of Islam with the religions and cultures of other nations throughout history and contemporary times.

*Bosnian Cultural History* (3rd year of study): Students through this course gain a clear picture of the wholeness, wealth and polyphony of Bosnian culture through history, and study the influence of other cultures and religions on Bosnian tradition.

*Islamic Culture in the Balkans* (elective course). In this course, students gain knowledge about relations between Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Balkans in the Ottoman period.

*Muslim Contribution to Civilization* (4th year of study). In this course, students are educated to be among those who will act as bridge-builders between cultures with an awareness of the common heritage of mankind.

#### 5.2.2. Collaborative and Participatory Projects

For the purpose of this work, only a few recent collaborative projects are presented in the following section.

*“Intercultural and Interreligious Values in College Education Programs/Higher Education Institutions (Bosnia and Herzegovina and the USA)”*

This project examined how college education programs in the U.S. and BH promote and advocate for intercultural and interreligious values of equity, diversity, tolerance and solidarity. Professors and students from Shenandoah University (Department of Leadership Studies) and Sarajevo University (Faculty of Islamic Studies) collaborated online through an extensive Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Barzinji project. A full collaboration was implemented throughout the 2021–2022 academic year. Students and professors worked on analyses of national and international legal frameworks, instruments and policies, with regard to intercultural values in education, analyses of the selected college education programs and development of educational project on intercultural life at the universities (Shiffman and Sijamhodžić-Nadarević 2022; Faculty of Islamic Studies of the Sarajevo University 2022a). This collaboration was extended in the 2022–2023 academic year through a new project under the title “*Educational Leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the U.S.*”

*The conference “30 years of Islamic Religious Education in the Educational System of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Experiences, Challenges and Perspectives”*

Through an overview of multiple experiences of religious education in the educational system of Bosnia and Herzegovina and educational systems in the surrounding region and Europe, the role, significance, goals, position and status, as well as outcomes and impacts of religious education were analyzed. The conference also presented experiences of religious education from the point of view of Catholic, Orthodox and Islamic religious education, respectively. The conference was held in November 2022 at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo (Faculty of Islamic Studies of the Sarajevo University 2022c).

Educational seminars and workshops

*Seminar “Strengthening Rhetorical Competencies of Future Religious Leaders”*

The participants of this seminar were students of the Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Sarajevo; the Orthodox Theological Faculty of Sv. Vasilije Ostroški from Foča and Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Sarajevo. At this seminar organized in 2022, a special emphasis was put on the presence of religious ministers in public. Participants reflected

on ministers' manners, behaviors, rhetorical abilities and the ways they send messages that influence public attitudes ([Faculty of Islamic Studies of the Sarajevo University 2022b](#)).

#### *Seminar "Faith in Peace-building"*

The Sarajevo Mufti office and the Konard Adenauer Foundation organized a collaborative seminar titled "Faith in Peace-building" for students in 2019. The lecturers consisted of renowned professors of the University of Sarajevo (from the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Islamic Studies), Franciscan theology in Sarajevo and famous BH journalists. Two activists from the BH organization "Suživot i Pomirenje/Coexistence and reconciliation" also spoke at the seminar ([Faculty of Islamic Studies of the Sarajevo University 2019](#)).

#### *Seminar and workshops "Religious Values and Public Space"*

Participants in this seminar were coordinators of the Department of Marriage, Family and Women's Activism of the Sarajevo Mufti's Majlis, students of the Faculty of Islamic Studies, students of the Catholic Theological Faculty and coordinators of the Madrasa in Visoko. Lecturers spoke about peace-building through public presentations, the role of religion in preventing religious intolerance and combating hate speech. Each lecture was accompanied by a workshop. A seminar under the same title was organized in 2016, 2017 and 2018 ([Preporod 2018](#)).

#### *Dialogue groups*

The following are examples of dialogue groups that routinely meet at the Faculty for conversations or activities with people from different religions and traditions:

#### *"Meeting of the Young Theologians"*

This project aimed at working on religious diversity through action by listening to young students from different theological faculties or working from the perspective of dialogue in order to design and implement a community development project.

#### *"Interreligious Dialogue in the Balkans: Achievements and Challenges"*

The Embassy of Canada in Budapest, which diplomatically covers Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with the Canadian Chair for the Study of Islam, Pluralism and Globalization at the University of Montreal, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Faculty of Islamic Studies, the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Sarajevo and the CNS in Sarajevo organized the forum "Interreligious dialogue in the Balkans: achievements and challenges" at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in 2015 ([Preporod 2015](#)).

## 6. Conclusions

As this article has indicated, normative sources of Islam in its essence include universal and intercultural values of tolerance, respect for others and dialogue. Out of these normative sources and implementation through history, cultures and societies, Islamic religious education draws the bulk of its content for the affirmation of intercultural values. Experts in the field of intercultural education believe that, in addition to other forms of education, religious education can contribute significantly to the development of intercultural values and thus improve the quality of coexistence in pluralistic European cultures. Consequently, many international organizations such as the UN, UNHCR, OSCE and COE have made significant efforts to ensure the development of intercultural values through education, also recognizing the significance of the religious dimension of intercultural education.

Analysis of official discourse of Bosnia and Herzegovina Islamic Religious Education, educational policies and the Islamic Community platform for dialogue and curriculum of IRE indicate that IRE in BH extensively contributes to the affirmation and development of intercultural values in domestic and European contexts. The analysis of curricular elements did not identify negative impacts on intercultural education and stereotypes regarding religions, women or minorities.

The curriculum of confessional Islamic Religious Education (IRE), a subject that is studied in BH state-administered schools, nurtures intercultural sensitivity and dialogical competencies of teachers and pupils for living in a pluralistic society. It is visible through its goals, objectives, teaching/learning content, professional development of IRE teachers and intercultural practices and projects. It is also notable that the curriculum of the

Islamic higher education study program “Islamic Religious Education/Pedagogy” of the University of Sarajevo’s Faculty of Islamic Studies, which educates religious teachers and mu’allims, offers numerous courses (linguistic, pedagogical, theological and historical (focusing on Islamic culture and civilization)) related to intercultural values. In addition to these theoretical bases, students gain practical experience with intercultural dialogue by participating in various intercultural and interreligious collaborative projects, seminars, workshops and dialogue groups. These initiatives are implemented in collaboration with Islamic, Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish communities, various educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, media representatives, embassies and international organizations. These initiatives are aimed at progressing the development of students, future teachers and mu’allims in their interreligious and intercultural dialogues in the Bosnian and European context.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Ethical review and approval were waived for this study by the Faculty of Islamic Studies, University of Sarajevo due to the fact that the interviews with teachers are within regular seminars for teacher professional development.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data were mostly obtained through the archive of the Faculty of Islamic Studies and its webpage, educational departments of the Islamic Community and the Ministry of Education, relevant journals, magazines, media reports, NGO webpages and interviews with IRE teachers of primary and secondary schools.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The concepts of tolerance have various meanings and can be used in different ways and for different purposes. Classical tolerance also implies the existence of boundaries because not everything can and should be tolerated, such as injustice, oppression, and harming others, according to [Cohen \(2004\)](#). More modern understanding of tolerance is common in social psychology and sociology and defines tolerance as openness, being well disposed toward cultural others, or having a generalized positive attitude toward them ([Verkuyten and Kollar 2021](#)). International organizations proposed policies that promote tolerance. For example, in 1996, the UN General Assembly invited member states to observe November 16th as the *International Day for Tolerance*, following from the *UN Year for Tolerance* in 1995. Tolerance in Declaration of Principles and Follow-up plan of Action for the United Nations Year for Tolerance (Article I, 1.1), is defined as “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the endless richness of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication and liberty of conscience . . . ” ([UNESCO 1995](#)). In this work the term tolerance is used based on the definitions proposed by international organizations.
- <sup>2</sup> Focus groups involved primary and secondary school religious teachers as a part of a seminar and workshops for Professional Development of IRE teachers organized in 2018 at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo. Focus groups of forty two teachers were undertaken in the workshops related to intercultural values to explore the most common intercultural and interreligious educational activities within the confessional IRE school subject. Part of the workshop included teachers describing and reflecting on their personal experiences in the classroom. Among the teachers were also those who are mentors in schools for the teaching internship students of the Faculty of Islamic Studies.
- <sup>3</sup> Participants’ names provided in the paper are pseudonyms.

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