

Modeling the Influence of Muallim on Children's Educational and Religious Development in Maktab Education Systems

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of Islamic education and religious development in maktabs in Bosnia and Herzegovina as non-formal Islamic educational institutions, with a focus on the perspective of muallims. The research employs a qualitative approach through structured interviews with muallims who have experience teaching in maktabs, both domestically and within diaspora communities. The study focuses on the development of children's religious training areas, the application of Islamic educational principles, as well as the approaches and teaching methods used. Research results indicate that religious education designed methodically and didactically can simultaneously develop various dimensions of children's education, especially the intellectual and moral aspects. Although teachers strive to apply the basic principles of Islamic education, some principles, such as individualization and the unity of education, still face implementation limitations. An educational approach that emphasizes reinforcement, positive encouragement, and value transformation has been proven to be dominant in supporting the internalization of Islamic values and the holistic development of children's personalities.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Islamic Religious Education at Maktab

Islam is the majority religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), with about 51% of the population adhering to Islam, and most identifying as Bosniak (Bosnian Muslims). The origins of Islamic education in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be traced back to the 15th century, when the Ottoman Empire conquered the region of Bosnia and implemented a traditional education system consisting of maktabs and madrasas. Since the arrival of the Ottomans, all educational institutions in Bosnia were established and developed under the influence of the education system that had already been established in Turkey. The Ottoman

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education system had its own uniqueness compared to other regions within the empire. Muslim schools in Bosnia from the 15th century until the second half of the 19th century were generally religious in nature and based on that educational model.

Among all educational institutions during the Ottoman era in Bosnia, maktab were the most numerous, although the exact number is difficult to determine (Hadžić, F. 2021). However, the large number of mosques that were established is a strong indication that the number of maktab was quite significant (Idriz, 2022). During the Ottoman rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is estimated that there were more than a thousand maktab (Lepenica, E. 2024).

As a basic-level religious education institution, a maktab is generally built around a mosque. (Mogra, I. 2023) The subjects taught and the textbooks used largely depend on the qualifications of the teacher (mu'allim) and the abilities of the students. (Ramazanov, R., Malamagomedov, et al 2021). In maktab with a high reputation, the quality of education is relatively better and the use of textbooks is more diverse. In the Sarajevo maktab, for example, books such as Sufara (a guide to reading the Qur'an), Tajwid, Ilmihal, Ilmi Akhlaq, Fiqh, Hadith, Muni, Halebija, Ta'lim al-Muta'allim, and other books are used. The main goal of maktab education is to teach students to read the Qur'an correctly and to provide them with basic knowledge of religion, worship, and morality (Mogra, I. 2022)

The teaching method in madrasas is generally traditional. The learning process is led by a mu'allim who usually also serves as the local mosque imam, assisted by a halifa (Kasmar, I et al 2019). Children often memorize material they do not fully understand because the languages used for instruction are Turkish and Arabic. There are no definite regulations regarding the length of the academic year, the age of school entry, or the division of classes (Albab, H. 2019).

The occupation of Bosnia by the Austro-Hungarian Empire did not stop the operation of the sibjan maktab. This institution continued to function without significant changes until the end of Austro-Hungarian rule (Protner, E. 2020). In the 1890s, the Austro-Hungarian government attempted to regulate the teaching system in maktab, as it was considered not in line with modern demands. Since 1893, a reformative maktab known as Maktabi Ibtida' was opened (Garai, I., & Nemeth, A. 2018)., designed to teach both religious and general subjects simultaneously.(Maulisa, Eka Sri Rahmawati, 2024)

However, this policy has drawn criticism. Bosnian intellectual Safvet-beg Bašagić stated that the cultural and educational backwardness of Bosnian Muslims actually stemmed from the maktab ibtida' system (Halilović, S. 2023). This is because maktab education was mandatory for children aged seven for three years, and graduation from maktab was a prerequisite for entering elementary school. As a result, children only completed basic education at the age of 14–15, which for most was already too late to proceed to secondary school (Beg, S. 2024). Only a few maktab graduates pursued higher education, limiting Muslims' access to strategic positions in society (Hadžić, F. 2021).

During the period between the two world wars, Raisul-Ulema Džemaludin ef. Čaušević advocated for school reforms, especially by introducing the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and publishing religious textbooks in the local language written in Arabic script (Čaušević, E. 2021; Mustajib; Muhammad Nazmu, Hoque; Zidni Nur, 2025). However, during the communist regime after 1945, children's religious education in schools was strictly limited and placed under state supervision (Čaušević, A., & Fusté-Forné, F. 2022).

Currently, maktab once again functions as a basic non-formal Islamic educational institution for Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main goal of maktab education is to introduce the basic teachings of Islam to children and prepare them to live an Islamic life in practice (Islamska Zajednica u BiH, 2019). Learners aged 6 to 15 are grouped by age or level of knowledge. The curriculum consists of nine years of learning divided into three levels (Hunainah, H. et al 2023). A major curriculum reform for maktab was carried out in 2003 by the Department of Religion and Education of the Riyasat of the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, resulting in the publication of Ilmihal books for all levels. Further reforms were carried out in 2020 with the publication of new textbooks (Abdul Momen 2024)

On a scale of more than 100,000 children and around 2,000 maktab, it shows that maktab are one of the largest non-formal education networks (Dina Sijamhodžić-Nadarević et al 2023). Maktab in Bosnia and Herzegovina operate on a regular schedule, employ educators with higher Islamic education, and reach hundreds of thousands of children both domestically and in the diaspora, affirming their position as a major pillar of contemporary non-formal Islamic education (Adis Puška et al. 2020)

1.2 Theoretical Framework of the Research

The fundamental goal of religious education is the positive and comprehensive development of humans as well as the optimization of all their potential (Z. Ozgen et al 2021). Therefore, religious education ideally begins at an early age. One of the main issues in religious pedagogy is how and in which direction education should be directed (Mohamad Idhan 2024). Based on this issue, this study examines the fields of education, principles, and methods of children's religious education in the context of maktab learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Rabia Redouane et al 2023)

The Qur'anic perspective emphasizes a comprehensive approach to education, covering moral, spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic, and social education. Islamic pedagogy views humans as an integration of cognitive (al-'aql), affective (qalb), and spiritual (ruh) aspects, which must be developed in balance to form individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and have noble character (insan al-kamil) (Kamridah et al. 2025) Education is not only aimed at transferring knowledge but also at shaping character and social awareness (Matevž Obrecht et al. 2022)

In Islamic pedagogical literature, various classifications of educational fields have been developed. Mahmud (2008) proposed the fields of moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, social, and political education. Meanwhile, in Western pedagogical literature, classifications of physical, intellectual, moral, social, aesthetic, and vocational education are recognized (Ramazanov, R. 2021). Additional fields such as health education, environmental education, democracy, human rights, tolerance, and sustainable development are generally understood as integral parts of the main educational fields (Constantinos Yanniris et al 2021)

The principles of education are also extensively discussed by classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn Sahnun, Al-Jahiz, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, and Az-Zarnuji. Ibn Sahnun emphasized justice, responsibility, patience, and the teacher's exemplary behavior as fundamental principles of child education. (Ali Murtopo, 2024) Al-Jahiz stressed the importance of considering the intellectual abilities of students and using language that is easy to understand. Al-Farabi viewed education as a conscious activity aimed at understanding something previously unknown, while Ibn Sina emphasized the importance of emotion regulation and a pleasant learning atmosphere. (Wicaksono, et.al 2024)

A significant contribution to the methodology of religious education was made by Al-Ghazali through his work *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which outlines the principles of compassion, material appropriateness, consistency, and positive orientation in education (Al-Ghazali, 2004). Az-Zarnuji in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* also emphasizes the principles of gradualism, repetition, active learning, and the connection between theory and practice (Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, 2022).

In modern pedagogy, Malić and Mužić (1990) as well as Vukasović (2001) put forward various educational principles such as objectives, activities, individualization, socialization, consistency, and positive orientation (Larysa Bilanova et al 2020) Considering the many classifications, religious educators are required to be able to manage the educational process in a planned and contextual manner (Rahil Najafov et al 2025)

This study uses the classification of educational principles according to Vukasović as the basis for analysis. Meanwhile, in the study of educational strategies, various methodological approaches are used, classified based on ways of acquiring knowledge, study group sizes, fields of education, constructivist theory, and social needs (Matijević et al., 2016). In addition, Slatina's confluence education theory, which emphasizes guidance, prevention, and discipline, is used as a framework to analyze children's religious education methods in Bosnian and Herzegovinian maktab, which aligns with the educational concepts in the Qur'an and Sunnah that are oriented towards persuasive, transformative, and humanistic approaches.

2. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of gaining a deep understanding of the implementation of Islamic education and religious guidance in maktab in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the perspective of muallims. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to comprehensively explore the experiences, views, and pedagogical practices of muallims in the context of non-formal religious education.

The data collection method used was a guided interview. In this method, the interview topics and questions are predetermined within a general framework, but the researcher has the flexibility to determine

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the order of questions and to delve into issues according to the dynamics of the interview. Guided interviews were chosen to provide space for respondents to express their views, experiences, and educational practices they have undergone in a reflective and contextual manner (Andrilović, 1986).

The research instrument consisted of a set of open-ended questions formulated based on the objectives and focus of the study. These questions were aimed at exploring the muallim's perspectives regarding: (1) the fields of education and religious guidance developed in maktab learning, (2) the educational principles applied in the process of child development, and (3) the approaches, methods, and forms of learning used in maktab education practice. The respondents' answers were then classified and coded into thematic categories relevant to the research questions.

The research subjects consisted of muallims who served as educators in maktabs under the auspices of the Islamic community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including maktabs within the Bosniak diaspora community. The data collection process was conducted in 2019, involving seventeen muallims, comprising sixteen male muallims and one female muallim. Additionally, this study also included muallims teaching in four diaspora community maktabs, namely in Sweden, Croatia, Belgium, and the United States.

The selection of informants was based on specific criteria, namely: (1) having a minimum of five years of teaching experience at a maktab, and (2) being recommended by at least three fellow muallim colleagues. These criteria were established to ensure that the respondents have adequate pedagogical experience and a deep understanding of maktab educational practices. Interviews were conducted both in person and via remote communication media, such as phone and Skype, depending on the availability and location of the respondents.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes and experiences of muallims regarding the potential realization of the main areas of children's religious education and development at the maktab, as well as to analyze the implementation of educational principles and the use of approaches and learning methods in maktab educational practice. Based on this purpose, the study is formulated into three research questions, namely: (1) what areas of religious education and development are developed in maktab students, (2) which educational principles are considered most important by muallims in children's religious development, and (3) what approaches and methods of religious education are used by muallims in maktab teaching.

3. Research Results

3.1 Development of Educational Fields and Training.

The interview results indicate that the teachers at the maktab generally strive to develop the main areas of children's education and religious guidance in an integrated manner. The areas that receive the most attention are intellectual and moral education, followed by social and physical education, while aesthetic and vocational education receive relatively limited attention. The teachers emphasize that character development is the primary goal of maktab education, but in practice, the development of intellectual aspects tends to be more dominant due to curriculum requirements, textbooks, and the applicable evaluation system.

In the context of physical education, the teacher strives to raise students' awareness of the importance of cleanliness, health, and physical activity. Learning activities are often accompanied by recreational and sports activities, such as group games, light physical exercises, as well as outdoor activities through educational visits and learning trips. During these activities, the teacher also connects physical activity with worship practices, particularly prayer, to emphasize the benefits of health and discipline. Additionally, various sports events and competitions are organized to encourage a healthy lifestyle and cooperation among students.

The field of intellectual education is the aspect that receives the most emphasis in the maktab curriculum. The teachers strive to foster learning motivation, reading and memorization skills of the Qur'an, as well as a basic understanding of Islamic teachings. Learning activities include mastery of Arabic letters, comprehension of religious texts, and strengthening memory and critical thinking skills through guided discussions. The use of modern learning media, including audiovisual materials and multimedia content, is utilized to increase students' interest in learning. In addition, students who demonstrate academic achievement are given awards as a form of motivation reinforcement.

Moral education is viewed by the muallims as the core of religious development in the maktab. Students are guided to understand and apply Islamic moral values in daily life, such as showing respect to parents and teachers, responsibility, honesty, patience, and empathy. Muallims also emphasize the importance of forming a positive Islamic identity, self-confidence, as well as pride in religion, culture, and tradition. Learning activities are often linked to students' real-life experiences through discussions, observing behavior, and habituating the practice of moral values in various social situations.

The development of social education runs in parallel with moral education. Teachers encourage students to build the ability to interact, cooperate, and live harmoniously with others. Social activities such as visiting community members in need, communal work, humanitarian activities, and participation in religious events together are utilized as means of social guidance. In addition, students are directed to develop attitudes of tolerance, non-violent communication, and social responsibility in community life.

In the field of aesthetic education, the muallim strives to instill an appreciation for beauty as part of Islamic teachings. Students are encouraged to maintain cleanliness and tidiness of themselves as well as the maktab and mosque environment. Various art and cultural activities, such as recitation of the Qur'an with tartil, vocal arts, religious drama, and classroom decoration, are organized to develop students' aesthetic sensitivity. The muallim also emphasizes the importance of balancing Islamic dress guidance with an awareness of the value of beauty.

The field of work education is developed through habituating attitudes of responsibility, discipline, and work ethic. Students are involved in various practical tasks in the school and mosque environment, such as maintaining the cleanliness of the learning spaces, assisting in activity preparations, and managing study and worship time. Teachers instill the understanding that success is the result of effort and perseverance, and encourage students to manage their time effectively and responsibly.

3.2 The Application of Educational Principles in Religious Development

Research results show that the muallim are aware of the importance of applying educational principles in maktab learning. However, some principles, such as individualization, diversity of development, and educational unity, are considered the most difficult to implement optimally. The main challenges faced include large student numbers, limited learning time, and a lack of structural support in the process of individual guidance.

The principle of activity is considered the most important and most frequently applied principle. Learners are given the opportunity to actively participate through questions and answers, discussions, educational games, and hands-on practice. The principle of consistency is realized through the enforcement of shared rules and the habituation of positive behaviors. The principle of patience is also emphasized as the foundation of pedagogical interaction, considering that an impatient approach can negatively impact learners' motivation and comfort in learning.

The principles of sustainability and gradual progression are applied through learning planning that is tailored to the abilities and development of the students. The teacher strives to adjust the materials and teaching methods to the age and understanding level of the children, although inconsistent student attendance often becomes a barrier to its implementation.

3.3 Approaches and Methods of Religious Education

In the practice of religious guidance, the most commonly used approach by muallims is the approach of reinforcement and positive encouragement. This approach focuses on shaping behavior and attitudes through motivation, exemplary behavior, and value transformation. The preventive approach is used to anticipate negative behavior through supervision and ongoing guidance, while the discipline and sanction approach is applied in a limited and proportional manner.

The most commonly used methods in maktab learning include lecture, explanation, storytelling, dialogue, advice, and role modeling. Storytelling is used to convey moral messages through stories from the Qur'an, the prophets, and exemplary figures. Dialogue is employed to actively engage students and develop critical thinking skills. Role modeling is considered an ideal method, where the muallim strives to be a real example in daily behavior and attitudes.

The disciplinary approach is implemented by emphasizing the development of self-discipline and responsibility. Sanctions are educational and non-violent, such as the reduction of certain privileges or the

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assignment of additional tasks. Physical punishment and emotional humiliation are not found in maktab learning. In general, muallims prioritize guidance that is persuasive and reflective in educating students.

4. Discussion

4.1 Development of Educational Fields and Religious Guidance

The findings reveal that the development of educational and religious guidance fields in Bosnian maktab reflects a holistic yet cognitively dominant model of Islamic education. The strong emphasis on intellectual and moral formation confirms that maktab continue to function as foundational institutions for transmitting religious knowledge and shaping character, which is consistent with the core objectives of Islamic pedagogy that position the integration of knowledge (*'ilm*) and ethics (*akhlaq*) as the central axis of human development (Mahmud, 2008; Kamridah et al., 2025). However, the predominance of cognitive oriented activities particularly Qur'anic literacy, memorization, and conceptual understanding also indicates the influence of curriculum structure, textbooks, and assessment mechanisms that prioritize measurable learning outcomes. This pattern supports earlier studies showing that institutional and evaluative frameworks in Islamic religious education often unintentionally narrow the space for balanced affective and psychomotor development (Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, 2011; Ozgen & Hassan, 2021).

At the same time, the integration of social engagement, physical activities, aesthetic expression, and responsibility-based tasks demonstrates that muallims attempt to move beyond purely textual instruction toward experiential and value-transformative learning. This confirms Mogra's (2023) argument that maktab education plays a community-oriented role in shaping socially responsible Muslim identities, and it reflects Al-Ghazali's educational principle that knowledge must be internalized through practice, habituation, and moral experience rather than cognitive transmission alone (El-Gazali, 2004). The presence of humanitarian activities, collaborative learning, and mosque-based communal participation indicates that religious education in this context operates as a form of lived pedagogy, where values are constructed through real social interaction. Such practices also resonate with contemporary holistic education frameworks that emphasize the integration of cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral domains in personality development (Obrecht et al., 2022).

The relatively limited attention given to aesthetic and vocational dimensions can be interpreted not merely as a pedagogical gap but as a structural consequence of the time-constrained and non-formal nature of maktab education. Unlike formal schooling systems, maktab operate within restricted instructional hours and depend heavily on the voluntary participation of learners, which leads teachers to prioritize what is perceived as the most essential religious competencies. This contextual condition explains why the ideal of balanced educational fields formulated in both classical Islamic educational thought and modern pedagogy cannot be fully realized in practice (Vukasović, 2001; Malić & Mužić, 1990). Thus, the imbalance found in this study should be understood as a systemic and organizational issue rather than a purely pedagogical limitation.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to the discourse on Islamic education by demonstrating that holistic educational ideals are not implemented through equal distribution of instructional time across all domains, but through the functional integration of values across learning activities. In other words, moral, social, physical, and aesthetic development often occurs implicitly within cognitively oriented religious learning. This expands previous conceptualizations of holistic Islamic education that tend to assume a proportional curricular model and instead proposes a context-adaptive holistic framework for non-formal religious institutions.

Practically, the findings imply that strengthening the holistic role of maktab does not necessarily require curriculum expansion, but rather pedagogical enrichment and institutional support. Providing structured co-curricular programs, integrating family and community collaboration, and developing learning media that simultaneously address cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions would enable a more balanced educational process without overburdening instructional time. In addition, teacher professional development that focuses on integrative learning design and differentiated guidance would help translate the philosophical foundations of Islamic pedagogy into more operational classroom practices.

Overall, this study shows that the development of educational and religious guidance fields in maktab represents a contextualized form of holistic Islamic education, where the dominance of intellectual and moral aspects functions as the core axis for the integration of other developmental domains. This

confirms the continued relevance of maktab as dynamic non-formal institutions capable of adapting classical Islamic educational principles to contemporary pedagogical realities while maintaining their primary role in the formation of religious identity and character (Sijamhodžić-Nadarević & Čolić, 2023).

4.2 The Application of Educational Principles in Religious Development

This study indicates that the application of educational principles in the religious development of maktab students is characterized by a pedagogical orientation that combines gradual instruction (*tadarruj*), habituation (*ta'wid*), exemplary practice (*uswah*), and experiential learning through worship and social participation. This confirms that the learning process in maktab is not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but functions as a structured process of internalizing Islamic values into students' daily behavior. The consistent use of repetition, guided practice in prayer and Qur'anic recitation, and moral supervision reflects a developmental approach in which religious competence is formed through continuous practice rather than cognitive mastery alone. Such a pattern indicates that the educational process follows a formative model that integrates instruction, guidance, and character building, which aligns with the classical Islamic educational objective of producing individuals who embody religious values in both personal and social life (Mahmud, 2008; El-Gazali, 2004).

These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the role of maktab and mosque-based education as institutions that apply value-oriented pedagogy through modeling, habituation, and communal religious practice (Mogra, 2023; Sijamhodžić-Nadarević & Čolić, 2023). Research in various European and Muslim educational contexts also shows that the effectiveness of religious education lies in the integration of instructional and developmental approaches rather than in doctrinal teaching alone (Ozgen & Hassan, 2021; Obrecht et al., 2022). However, this study provides a more operational explanation of how these educational principles are implemented in daily learning activities through structured routines, teacher–student interaction, and mosque-based social engagement. While earlier studies have mainly discussed these principles at a conceptual level, the present findings demonstrate their concrete pedagogical manifestations in a non-formal religious education setting, thereby filling an important empirical gap in the literature.

From a theoretical perspective, the results reinforce the constructivist and holistic paradigms in Islamic education, which view religious learning as a process of meaning-making through lived experience rather than as the passive reception of normative content. The integration of cognitive instruction with affective guidance and behavioral supervision reflects what contemporary educational theory describes as transformative learning, where knowledge leads to changes in attitudes and actions. At the same time, the findings extend classical Islamic educational thought by showing that principles such as *uswah hasanah*, *targhib–tarhib* (encouragement and warning), and *ta'wid* operate within a modern pedagogical framework that includes structured curriculum, evaluation, and institutional organization. This indicates that traditional Islamic educational philosophy is not replaced by modern pedagogy but is pedagogically reformulated in contemporary learning environments.

The successful application of these principles can be explained by several interrelated factors. First, the strong personal authority of the *muallim* as a moral and spiritual model creates an affective bond that increases students' receptiveness to guidance, which is a key element in value internalization. Second, the mosque as a learning environment provides an authentic religious atmosphere that allows students to directly practice what they learn, thereby strengthening the connection between knowledge and action. Third, the continuity of learning through routine activities enables the gradual formation of religious habits, which is essential for character development. These contextual and relational factors explain why the application of educational principles in maktab is able to produce observable behavioral changes despite limited instructional time.

This study contributes theoretically by proposing that the effectiveness of religious education in non-formal institutions is determined not by curriculum density but by the consistency of pedagogical principles that integrate instruction, guidance, and lived religious experience. This shifts the analytical focus from “what is taught” to “how religious values are pedagogically internalized,” thereby offering a process-oriented model of Islamic education. Furthermore, by providing empirical evidence from the Bosnian maktab context, this study enriches the global discourse on Islamic pedagogy, which has been largely dominated by formal schooling perspectives.

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Practically, the findings imply that strengthening religious development programs requires reinforcing the pedagogical competence of muallims in applying integrative educational principles rather than merely expanding learning materials. Training programs should focus on mentoring skills, reflective guidance, and the design of experiential learning activities that connect religious knowledge with real-life practice. Institutional support is also needed to create sustainable routines, involve parents and the wider community, and provide learning resources that facilitate value internalization. Through these strategies, maktab can further optimize their role as formative institutions that develop not only students' religious literacy but also their moral agency and social responsibility.

4.3 Approaches and Methods of Religious Education

The approaches and methods applied in the maktab learning process reflect a pedagogical model that integrates teacher-centered guidance with participatory and experiential learning. The dominance of demonstration, guided practice in acts of worship, repetition in Qur'anic recitation, storytelling, moral advice, and dialogical interaction shows that religious education is not delivered solely as doctrinal knowledge but as a structured process of value internalization. This suggests that the effectiveness of religious learning lies in the combination of instructional clarity and affective engagement, where students not only understand religious concepts but also practice and experience them in real contexts. Such a pattern confirms that the pedagogical orientation of maktab education is formative and practice-based, in which learning outcomes are measured through behavioral transformation rather than cognitive achievement alone (Mahmud, 2008; Kamridah et al., 2025).

This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the centrality of modeling (*uswah*), habituation, and experiential worship practices in mosque-based education across different cultural contexts (Mogra, 2023; Sijamhodžić-Nadarević & Čolić, 2023). Research on Islamic religious pedagogy in European settings also highlights that dialogical and participatory approaches enhance students' religious understanding and identity formation more effectively than purely lecture-based methods (Ozgen & Hassan, 2021; Obrecht et al., 2022). However, this study provides a more nuanced empirical contribution by demonstrating how these approaches are operationalized in a non-formal institutional structure through structured routines, individualized guidance, and community-based learning activities. While earlier studies often discussed pedagogical approaches at the conceptual or policy level, the present findings show their concrete classroom implementation and their interaction with institutional constraints such as limited instructional time and heterogeneous student backgrounds.

From a theoretical perspective, the results reinforce the relevance of holistic and constructivist learning theories in the context of Islamic education, where knowledge is constructed through active participation, reflection, and social interaction. The use of storytelling, dialogue, and practice-based worship aligns with transformative learning theory, which views learning as a process that changes learners' frames of reference through meaningful experience. At the same time, the findings confirm classical Islamic pedagogical principles such as *talqin* (guided instruction), *ta'wid* (habituation), *targhib-tarhib* (encouragement and warning), and *uswah hasanah* as pedagogically compatible with contemporary student-centered learning paradigms. This indicates that traditional Islamic educational methods are not inherently teacher-centered in a rigid sense but can function as interactive and reflective learning strategies when applied contextually. In contrast to modern secular pedagogical assumptions that often dichotomize teacher-centered and student-centered approaches, this study shows that in religious education both can operate complementarily.

The effectiveness of these approaches and methods can be explained by several contextual and relational factors. First, the strong moral authority and personal example of the muallim create an emotional and spiritual connection that increases students' motivation and receptiveness to religious guidance. Second, the mosque as a learning environment provides an authentic experiential space where learning is immediately translated into practice, thereby strengthening the integration between knowledge and action. Third, the flexibility of the non-formal maktab structure allows teachers to adapt methods to students' developmental stages and individual learning needs. These factors explain why participatory and practice-based methods can function effectively even within limited instructional time and without the formal assessment mechanisms typical of school systems.

This study contributes theoretically by proposing that the pedagogical effectiveness of non-formal Islamic education lies in the integration of directive, dialogical, and experiential approaches within a value-oriented learning environment. This integrative model challenges the binary classification of teaching methods into traditional versus modern or teacher-centered versus student-centered, and instead offers a context-responsive pedagogical framework for religious education. Furthermore, by providing empirical evidence from the Bosnian maktab context, this research enriches the global literature on Islamic pedagogy, which has largely focused on formal schooling and has paid limited attention to the methodological dynamics of mosque-based education.

Practically, these findings imply that improving the quality of religious education does not primarily require the introduction of new teaching methods but rather the strengthening of teachers' pedagogical competence in integrating various approaches in a balanced and contextually responsive manner. Professional development programs for muallims should therefore emphasize dialogical teaching skills, reflective guidance, experiential learning design, and differentiated instruction. Institutional support is also needed to provide learning media, create collaborative learning activities, and facilitate community involvement so that participatory and practice-based methods can be implemented more systematically. Through these efforts, maktab can further develop as dynamic learning environments that not only transmit religious knowledge but also cultivate reflective, socially responsible, and spiritually grounded individuals.

4.4 Cross Subtheme Synthesis: Integrative Pedagogical Model of Maktab Education

Taken together, the findings of this study reveal that the development of educational fields, the application of educational principles, and the selection of instructional approaches in the maktab are not separate pedagogical components but mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single formative learning system oriented toward value internalization and character construction. The apparent dominance of cognitive and moral instruction in the educational fields is pedagogically balanced by the consistent application of habituation, exemplary modeling, and experiential worship practices, as well as by dialogical and participatory teaching methods. This indicates that holistic religious development in the maktab does not occur through an equal distribution of curricular time across developmental domains, but through the functional integration of knowledge, practice, and social interaction within a value-oriented learning environment. Such a pattern confirms that the maktab operates as a process-based educational institution in which intellectual understanding, spiritual formation, and behavioral transformation are interconnected outcomes of a continuous pedagogical cycle (Mahmud, 2008; El-Gazali, 2004; Mogra, 2023).

This integrative configuration extends previous studies that have tended to examine Islamic religious education from fragmented perspectives either focusing on curriculum content, moral formation, or teaching methods separately (Ozgen & Hassan, 2021; Obrecht et al., 2022; Sijamhodžić-Nadarević & Čolić, 2023). By empirically demonstrating the dynamic interaction between educational domains, pedagogical principles, and instructional practices in a non-formal mosque-based setting, this study offers a more comprehensive and operational understanding of how holistic Islamic education is actually enacted in everyday learning. In doing so, it challenges the common assumption in modern educational discourse that balanced development requires proportional curricular allocation and instead proposes that in religious education, integration is achieved through the continuity of value-based practice across all learning activities. This finding is particularly relevant to the global discussion on faith-based education, where the tension between doctrinal transmission and transformative learning remains a central issue.

From a theoretical perspective, the synthesis of these subthemes leads to the formulation of an integrative pedagogical model of non-formal Islamic education in which directive instruction, participatory learning, and experiential practice function as complementary strategies for the internalization of religious values. This model bridges classical Islamic educational philosophy especially the concepts of *tarbiyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib* with contemporary holistic and constructivist learning theories by showing that religious knowledge becomes transformative when it is mediated through social interaction, routine practice, and moral guidance. In contrast to the binary categorization of traditional versus modern pedagogy, the maktab learning system demonstrates a context-responsive synthesis in which teacher authority coexists with student engagement and experiential learning. This provides a new conceptual contribution to the literature by positioning mosque-based education as a dynamic pedagogical space capable of adapting classical principles to contemporary learning paradigms.

The effectiveness of this integrative system can be explained by the convergence of several contextual factors: the moral authority and personal example of the muallim, the mosque as an authentic spiritual and social learning environment, the continuity of routine religious practice, and the flexibility of the non-formal institutional structure. These elements create a learning ecology in which cognitive instruction, affective formation, and behavioral habituation occur simultaneously and reinforce one another. As a result, religious education in the maktab is able to produce observable character formation despite limited instructional time and the absence of formal assessment mechanisms, a finding that strengthens the argument that the quality of pedagogical processes is more decisive than the quantity of instructional hours.

Theoretically, this cross-subtheme synthesis contributes to the global discourse on Islamic education by shifting the analytical focus from curriculum structure to the pedagogical process of value internalization as the core mechanism of holistic development. It proposes that the effectiveness of non-formal religious education lies in its capacity to integrate educational domains, principles, and methods into a coherent formative system. This perspective enriches existing models of Islamic pedagogy, which have largely been developed based on formal schooling contexts, and highlights the unique epistemological and pedagogical characteristics of mosque-based learning institutions.

Practically, this integrative model implies that efforts to strengthen maktab education should prioritize the reinforcement of pedagogical coherence rather than the expansion of curricular content. Teacher professional development should focus on the integration of directive, dialogical, and experiential learning strategies, while institutional policies should support sustainable routines, community involvement, and the development of learning resources that facilitate value internalization. Through these strategies, the maktab can further evolve as a holistic formative institution that not only preserves religious knowledge but also produces socially responsible, spiritually grounded, and morally reflective individuals in contemporary society.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how educational fields, pedagogical principles, and instructional approaches are implemented in the maktab and how they contribute to students' religious development. The findings demonstrate that maktab education functions as a formative learning system in which cognitive understanding, moral formation, and religious practice are integrated through structured routines, exemplary modeling, habituation, and experiential learning. Thus, religious development is not achieved through the transmission of doctrinal knowledge alone, but through a continuous process of value internalization that connects knowledge, action, and social engagement within an authentic religious learning environment.

The main synthesis of this study shows that the holistic character of maktab education does not depend on proportional curricular distribution across developmental domains, but on the pedagogical coherence between educational content, guiding principles, and teaching methods. This integrative process enables the formation of religious character despite institutional limitations such as limited instructional time and the non-formal nature of the program. The principal contribution of this research lies in proposing an integrative pedagogical perspective for non-formal Islamic education that bridges classical Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary holistic and constructivist learning theories, while also providing empirical evidence from the Bosnian maktab context that remains underrepresented in global scholarship on religious education.

Practically, these findings imply the need to strengthen the pedagogical competence of muallims in designing integrative, dialogical, and experiential learning and to support maktab institutionally through sustainable programs, community involvement, and relevant learning resources. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal and comparative designs across different cultural and institutional contexts to examine the long-term impact of mosque-based education on students' religious identity, moral agency, and social responsibility, as well as to explore the integration of digital learning environments into non-formal Islamic education.

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