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The Hikmah Model as a Means for Interconvictional Dialogue and Citizenship Education in Francophone (Belgian) Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

Much attention has been given to interreligious dialogue in recent decades. However, less attention has been devoted to models that support citizenship through Islamic religious education in secondary education. Based on Lipman’s Philosophy for Children, Hashim developed the Hikmah model. This model contributes to cognitive, social, and affective skills of Muslim pupils. A theoretical framework regarding interreligious education and the Hikmah model exploring the didactic opportunities is given. The explorative qualitative research aims to explore the potential of the Hikmah model for Islamic religious education (IRE) in Francophone secondary education.

KEYWORDS
Islam; citizenship; interconvictional dialogue; Hikmah model; critical thinking;

Introduction

Belgium is a federal constitutional monarchy with a separation of church and state (Sägesser 2007, 2009). Since 1988, education has been a community responsibility, governed and administered by the Flemish, French, and German Communities (Blaise 1991; Fannes et al. 2013). Additionally, Belgium has a pillar-based educational system. Denominational private schools (mostly Catholic schools) as well as public education (municipal and province schools, school of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, hereafter FWB) exist next to each other. A vast majority of schools in Wallonia and Brussels ruled by the French Community1 are still Catholic (Derroitte 2015; ORELA 2018). Article 24 of the Belgian Constitution protects the freedom of education and the rights of parents’ choices regarding the education of their child (État Fédéral, 1994). The first paragraph stipulates that the Communities must provide neutral education, i.e. an education which respects philosophical, ideological, or religious freedom of choice on the part of parents (Sägesser and de Coorebyter 2000; Conseil de la Communauté Française, 1994; Communauté Française, 2003; Sägesser, 2012). Based on article 24 §2, the public schools are required to organize two hours per week of funded religious and non-confessional education.2 Today, Belgium recognizes and subsidizes eight life stances (Wolfs & Raes, 2015; Echallaoui, 2015).3

1Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles
2Since the school year of 2017–2018, one hour of religious or non-confessional education and one hour of Philosophy and Citizenship.
Belgium is characterized by an increasing religious plurality with, on average, 7% of its population identifying as Muslim (Djelloul and Maréchal 2018; Dassetto 2019). Consequently, Muslims are one of the largest minority groups (Fadil et al. 2011; Fadil, et al. 2015) in schools in which multiple belief backgrounds are represented. As a consequence of the constitutional recognition of the Islam in 1974, the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique (hereafter EMB) was appointed as the official spokespartner of the State (Federale Overheidsdienst Justitie n.d.; Sägesser & Torrekens, 2008; Touag, 2017). The Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique is autonomously responsible for—among other things—the content and development of the Islamic religious education programs for private and public primary and secondary education, and the Islamic religious education teachers’ training programs (Lafrarchi 2020, 2021). The Islamic religious education program of 2010 is written and validated by Muslim members of the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique as this belongs to the sole legal competence of the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique. The Islamic religious education Framework of 2013 was also written by Muslim members of the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique. Hence, the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique had to take into account the decrees promulgated by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (FWB), and at the end had to be validated by the parliament of the French speaking community.4 The main argument to do so was that the recognized life stances present in school have “also” to contribute to citizenship education via common activities organized in a school context (Islamic Religious Framework, Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique, see page.9; Parlement de la Communauté Française 2005, 2007; Herla, 2015).

Definitions and research questions

This article focuses on the Francophone secondary education system, more specifically on the interconvictional competencies in the state-endorsed Islamic religious education program. The paper tracks a shift from Islamic religious education developed and organized by the Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique as solely official spokespartner of the state to the interconvictional common program developed by the recognized life stances, which is endorsed by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, particularly from an Islamic religious education perspective.

The following acronyms will be used repeatedly:

- **IRE**: Islamic religious education;
- **EMB**: Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique, this is the official Representative Body for Islamic religion and official spokespartner of the State for all Islam-related matters, including Islamic religious education;
- **EMB 2010**: the official Islamic religion education program (hereafter IRE program) for secondary education in private and public schools of the French Community;
- **EMB 2013**: the official Islamic religious education framework (hereafter IRE Framework) developed by the EMB based on the decrees regarding the

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4The Framework of the other recognized religions also had to be in line with the decrees promulgated by the FWB.
interconvictional competences and citizenship education promulgated by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles; and

- FWB: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, this is the French-speaking legal body responsible for French speaking education in Wallonia and bilingual Brussels Capital Region.

In this article we define interconvictional dialogue as “an active and conscious encounter between persons with different religious and convictional backgrounds.” We do not use the concepts interreligious of interfaith dialogue as the French policy and legal documents, as well as the IRE Framework (EMB 2013) refer to “le dialogue interconvictionel” (interconvictional dialogue). By doing so, the recognized non-theistic life stances, humanism and Buddhism, are included. Over the last decades, much attention has been given to intercultural and/or interconvictional education in a school context. However, no systematic content analysis has been done regarding interconvictional education—with focus on IRE—in the Belgian-Francophone context.

This qualitative research is exploratory in nature. Two digitally available key documents are central in this study, since there are no other official documents, or sources of information, for teachers to draw upon in preparing and developing their IRE lessons: the IRE program (EMB 2010) and IRE Framework (EMB 2013). Three research questions are formulated:

1. How does the IRE program (2010) implicitly or explicitly stimulate and enhance the interconvictional skills of upper secondary education pupils?
2. How does the IRE Framework (2013) implicitly or explicitly stimulate and strengthen the interconvictional skills and citizenship of upper secondary education pupils?
3. How can the Hikmah Model be implemented as a tool to develop the interconvictional skills and citizenship of upper secondary education pupils within the IRE courses and interconvictional common courses?

**Theoretical framework**

**Religious development**

Focusing on the religious identity development, the Interpretative Approach of Jackson (2009) describes four core pedagogical principles: representation, interpretation, reflection and edification. We cannot elaborate on these four concepts in this limited space, but for Jackson (2004), edification is conceived as the result of a reflection process by which the pupil reflects on the meaning of acquired (experiential) knowledge and integrates this in his knowledge about himself and others that they have constructed so far. This critical process can lead to a reassessment of a person’s religious identity. Jackson also underlines the teacher’s role, namely as being dialogical, and develops for this purpose adequate didactic materials (Jackson 2004; O’Grady 2010). Having such a dialogical attitude implies a sensitive attitude toward the ideas, thoughts, and interests of students.

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5Only when relevant or explicitly referring to religious life stances (mostly monotheistic religions)
regarding study materials and learning activities. Teachers have to be impartial (Jackson and Everington 2016) and should create a ‘safe space’ for pupils to feel free to speak and articulate their thoughts, feelings, and even their fears (Andree and Bakker 1996; Jackson 2004; Roux 2012; Jackson and Everington 2016) and a rich learning environment to stimulate such a learning process (Ter Avest and McDougall 2014).

Sahin (2013) studied the religious identity development of British and Kuwaiti Muslims. He asserts that critical-dialogical and transformative educators play a crucial role in developing and strengthening pupils’ religious identity. Bulckens and Roebben (2001) developed religious didactics, which considered the fundamentally changing world, life experience, and the Christian tradition. In order to deal theologically and pedagogically with internal and external diversity in Catholic schools, Lombaerts and Pollefeyt and Lombaerts (2004) developed a hermeneutic communicative model (HCM). The starting point of the HCM are the hermeneutical intersections (Lombaerts 2000) related to religious and ideological issues that are raised in classrooms. The aim is to create the opportunity to discover one’s own and another’s religious and ideological ideas, and to stimulate, strengthen, and develop sensitivity for the “other” in classroom. Roebben (2000) asserts that universal questions are raised on a personal level through critical evaluation of particular religious and non-religious beliefs based on shared human experiences. In line with this preposition, he developed an inclusive religious pedagogy (2012, 2015). According to Agen (2011) interreligious dialogue between youngsters and pupils has to conform to prerequisites, including: (1) religious identity development and (2) multiple, creative and reflective didactics through deepening and concrete questions. In order to do so; Agen has listed several levels to work on: (1) questions for clarification, (2) questions for arguments, (3) questions for alternatives, (4) questions for consequences, and (5) questions to evaluate and make conclusions. Vermeer (2010) states that religious education can be seen as part of the civic and societal training to develop reflexive and critical skills. To conclude (REDCo Research Project 2009), the following recommendations were formulated to increase engaged and contextualized interfaith dialogue: (1) fostering peaceful coexistence, (2) promoting diversity management, (3) inclusion of religious as well as non-religious worldviews, and (4) development of professional competences (see also Skeie et al. 2013). The Council of Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2016; Jackson 2014) elaborates on the REDCo recommendations and presents concrete suggestions for teachers involved in the diverse context of European education. The fundamental rationale for including religion in education work is related to human rights, citizenship, and intercultural education. However, the term “religious education” is not as such mentioned in the Council of Europe (CoE) documents.

The authors cited above pointed at pedagogical didactic elements such as the importance of the learning context as a powerful and rich environment (Ter Avest and McDougall 2014; Roux 2012), the developmental processes of the learner (Jackson 2004; Sahin 2013), the pivotal role of the teacher (Jackson and Everington 2016), the learning environment as a safe space (Andree and Bakker 1996; Jackson 2004; Roux 2012), and the used didactic material (Bulckens and Roebben 2001; Roebben 2012, 2015; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2016; Lafrarchi, 2020). These findings are relevant to our discussion of the Hikmah Model. This model is based on P4C,
therefor we briefly describe the main elements of Lipman’s Philosophy for Children-model (P4C), since the Hikmah Model is based on P4C.

**Philosophy for children (P4C)**

The Philosphizing with Children model (P4C) can be described as a didactic method through which real-life questions are discussed in the classroom to help children express their thoughts, feelings, fears, and experiences in a structured manner, while being moderated by the teacher (Büttner 2007). Theologizing as a didactic method aims to stimulate the development of religiosity in young children, even in Kindergarten (Kanmeyer and Schwarz 2013). We describe theologizing as “an approach to RE that appreciates and fosters the children’s questions and their interpretation of the things in their life and their image of God” (ibid., p. 111). Philosophizing and theologizing “share the attempt of recognizing children as independent thinkers and having their opinions heard, (...) as thinking about the great questions of humanity which concerns each of us” (ibid., p. 113).

P4C is based on the Community of Inquiry method (Col) (Lipman 1988) which promotes and strengthens logical reasoning ability, critical and creative thinking, self-esteem, listening skills, and involvement in group discussions by using specific philosophical life issues. These stories focus on ethical and social issues such as honesty, lying, and telling the truth or topics as children rights, animal rights, employment, and gender discrimination. This trains students to ask relevant, critical and philosophical questions about the learning content, to articulate rational arguments, to justify their positions and opinions, and to formulate evidence for their assertions (Othman and Hashim 2006). The teacher explicitly encourages active involvement, so that activities such as open conversations, dialogue, reflecting on other opinions, collective learning, reasoning, discussion, and questioning can take place as inspirational didactic methods.

Philosophy for Children (Zulkifli et al. 2020; Naji and Hashim 2017) is implemented in countries such as Denmark (Jespersen 2017), Australia (Burgh 2017; MCEETYA 2008), Russia (Retyunskikh 2017), Japan (Kono 2017), Iran (Naji 2017), Singapore (Lim 1994), UK (Williams 1993), and China (Lam 2013). In what follows, we describe the Hikmah model, which is based on the P4C model.

**Hikmah model in super diverse Francophone schools**

Two definitions guided our study. First, interconvictional dialogue is defined as an active and conscious encounter between persons with different religious and convictional background.” Second, P4C is defined as “an educational approach which appreciates, promotes, and stimulates the questions asked by children (young people) and their interpretations of things in their life and their image of God.” With this premises, we “recognize children (and young people) as independent thinkers with their own opinions and capacity to reflect on the big [existential] questions which concern us all as human beings.” The IRE Framework contains guidelines, instructions and explicitly encourages the organization of a minimum of hours of common life stance lessons and
activities (EMB 2013). We note that the Council of Philosophical Courts Decree (Parlement de la Communauté Française, 2005) includes the following passage:

(... to formulate proposals relating to opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and practices between the various philosophical courses, to formulate with respect for the specificities of each and within the framework of the Missions Decree, all proposals likely to encourage dialogue between the different recognized religions and humanism6 and to promote common values (Decree of 03 June 2005; EMB 2013, p. 6)

We emphasize that the Missions Decree has the particular objective of “preparing students to be responsible citizens, capable of contributing to the development of a democratic, united, pluralist society open to other cultures” (Conseil de la Communauté Française, 1997; Parlement de la Communauté Française, 2007). Thus, in what ways and to what extent can the Hikmah Model be introduced into Francophone (Islamic) RE and be made successful for Francophone students? How can the Hikmah Model, developed in the diverse Malaysian context, foster and facilitate interconvictional dialogue, critical thinking, collaborative spirit, personal and interpersonal development in the diverse context of French-speaking public high schools? In the following, we sketch the main elements regarding the Hikmah Model and Hikmah pedagogy.

Since 1998, Malaysia has chosen a holistic approach in which attention is given to intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional development opportunities. Therefore, a preference is given to more student-centered teaching methods and strategies such as research and exploration methods, the Socratic method, discussion, project and group work. To enhance critical thinking, Hashim introduced in 2002 Lipman’s P4C (Preece and Juperi 2014) in secondary education curricula, and from the beginning, it was considered a cross-curricular method in Malay education.

In 2006, the Center for Philosophical Inquiry in Education (CPIE) was established with the aim of promoting the work method known as “philosophical inquiry” in education under the direction of Rosnani Hashim, professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Hashim (and IIUM) introduced the Hikmah Model in secondary education in Moral Education Class (Zulkifli and Hashim 2019a, 2019b; Zulkifli and Hashim 2020), in the English courses (Hashim, Hussien, and Imran 2014), Islamic Studies (Zulkifli et al. 2020; Zulkifli and Azman 2021), and Civic and Citizenship Education (Hussein, Hashim, and Mokhtar 2017). As prerequisites, Hashim, Hussien, and Imran (2014) describe the following: skills and attitudes of the teacher, the quality and relevance of the learning materials, the customized creative activities and exercises, and the support of the school board. The latter is especially important to ensure that sufficient resources are made available to implement the Hikmah pedagogy.

The Hikmah Model supports pupils in learning to philosophize about critical and creative thinking, personal and interpersonal development and the ability to make sense of experience. It also introduces a new element, i.e. the reflection on Qur’anic verses, hadiths, and local Malaysian traditions through stories designed specifically for this purpose (Hashim, 2009; Hashim and Banging 2009; Hashim 2012). Examples of stories with real-life elements used can be found in the series, Thinking Stories for Muslim Children: Mira’s new school (Hashim 2009a), Mira’s trip to the zoo (Hashim 2009b),

6Meanwhile Buddhism was recognized in October 2020.
Mira’s thinking about God (Hashim and Banging 2009) and Mira helping the poor (Hashim and Abdullah 2009; Hashim, Hussien, and Juperi 2014). The book Mira’s trip to the zoo describes the visit of Mira. Children are encouraged to recognize to think and talk about their own experiences. At crucial moments, the teacher encourages the pupils to think by asking questions. The teacher is therefore a supervisor of the thinking process and the formulation of thoughts, avoiding suggestive questions and expects no right answers. The learning objectives are respectfully listening to others, formulating feelings and experiences, phrasing critical questions about the discussed topic, and giving well-founded reasons for their viewpoints during such a dynamic class event. By doing so, they exercise their questioning and reasoning abilities and thus strengthen their cognitive and affective competencies through philosophical discussions stimulated by true life storytelling and exchange of experience.

Before and after the implementation of the Hikmah pedagogy, Hashim, Hussien, and Imran (2014) studied pupils’ feelings and attitudes toward the Hikmah Model, the critical thinking development skills, and improving students’ confidence through surveys, interviews, observation in class, and analysis of pupils’ notes. In sum, overall pupils’ sentiment toward the model was positive. Furthermore, Yusoff et al. (2018) studied the impact of the Hikmah Pedagogy on twenty-first-century skills of primary and secondary school pupils such as critical thinking, caring, collaborative thinking, and communication skills of students. Participating teachers were trained by experts from the Center for Teaching Thinking, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and observed and supervised to ensure Hikmah pedagogy was properly implemented. The Hikmah pedagogy was also implemented in higher education to explore how and in what sense pupils’ views on Islam and Muslim practices are influenced by culture and tradition (Hussein 2022). The main aim is to make them more open and understanding toward other religions and traditions, paving the way to accept and respect the existing differences (Hussein, Mohd Mokhtar, and Hashim 2020). The results of these studies show that the Hikmah pedagogy has the potential to lead to more and better intercultural dialogue. However, further inquiry is need before applying it to Francophone educational context.

**Method**

**Document analysis**

This qualitative research is exploratory in nature. Two key documents are studied systematically, namely the Islamic religious education program (IRE program, 2010) and Cours de Religion Islamique Référentiel de Compétences (IRE Framework; EMB 2013). For this, we will use the desk research method (Paquay, De Ketele, and Crahay 2006; Bowen 2009; Trede & Higgs, 2009). The two documents are at the heart of the study, since there are no other official documents, or sources of information, on which the IRE teachers can rely to prepare their IRE lessons. Both key documents are digitally available on the website of the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium under the topic “education” (www.embnet.be). Originally, it was the intention to perform observations during the IRE classes in the third grade of secondary education. Due to the COVID measures, it was not possible to collect empirical data. Therefore, the choice was made
to perform a systematic textual analysis of the two digitally-available documents. The objective of this research is to examine whether there are subjects, themes, and references in the two key documents for the teacher in order to stimulate and strengthen students’ interconvictional skills via the Hikmah Model.

Data material and coding

Both documents were systematically analyzed based on predefined content and thematic codes (cf. Table 1). The initial list of codes was extracted from the literature (cf. supra). Concepts, which were central (linked with the research questions, further RQ) in the abovementioned studies were selected. This was the first step of the process. The initial list of codes serves as a “reading grid” to perform the systematic analysis. This iterative process is repeated several times, during which we combine the analysis of textual (content) and thematic elements (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Firstly, with the initial codes as a reading grid. Secondly, by re-reading the chapters one-by-one to search for new textual (content) and thematic elements. Thirdly, an analysis of the legal documents directly related to the IRE Framework (2013) was conducted, as it refers to several Decrees in the introduction chapter (EMB 2013) of the document and it was approved by the Walloon Parliament. New concepts (~codes) emerged during the repeated systematic analysis of the two key documents and legal documents (cf. Additional Codes, Table 1). This process was repeated until no new concepts related to the RQ were found. The detailed systematic analysis aims to answer the research questions (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006; Yin, 1994). The codes are concepts, words that for instance refer to the central concept in this study: interconvictional dialogue skills. Thus, a code is “a word, a (part of a) phrase which refers to and captures the essence of the meaning of a (broad) concept” (Saldana 2013). Specific attention is given to elements present in the two key documents that could directly or indirectly contribute to the interconvictional dialogue skills and be relevant to evaluate the possibility for the implementation of the Hikmah Model.

The IRE program (EMB 2010) is divided into five sections: (1) faith, (2) worship, (3) Qur’an, (4) ethics, and (5) Sira and History. The parts of interest in this study are the objectives of IRE (p. 3) and the program for the upper classes (pp. 27–34).

Table 1. Codes – Reading Grid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial codes</th>
<th>Additional codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Behavior of the prophet(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and Islamic behavior</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconvictional dialogue</td>
<td>Common courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconvictional competencies</td>
<td>Islamic values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interreligious competencies</td>
<td>Islamic personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interreligious dialogue</td>
<td>Openness to the diverse world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living together</td>
<td>Participative citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to the others</td>
<td>Racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural society</td>
<td>Respect for other religious beliefs and non-religious beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Responsibility and responsible engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qur’anic verses and hadiths</td>
<td>Way of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and non-confessional beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious encounter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for other beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the IRE Framework (EMB 2013) we analyze the following parts:

1. General introduction (pp. 3–9),
2. General objectives for the third grade of secondary education (p.10),
3. Macro competencies (pp. 11–14),
4. The learning outcomes (pp. 15–19),
5. Course-specific learning goals (pp. 22–30),
6. Transversal competencies and pedagogical framework (pp. 50–55) and
7. Common competencies regarding encounter activities and collaboration among the recognized belief systems (pp. 56–60).

The reading grid includes codes, which could be directly or indirectly linked to the central concept interconvictional (dialogue) skills (cf. Table 1).

**Results and opportunities for Hikmah Model**

Hereafter, we sketch the most relevant findings of the analysis of both official documents regarding the third grade of Francophone secondary education.

*Islamic religious education program for secondary education*

The IRE program (2010) contains a limited number of subjects and reflects an educative approach in which rites are central. In particular for this study: the curriculum of the fifth and sixth year contains broadly formulated subjects.

We note that there is no didactic or pedagogical guideline included in this IRE program. Only, a one-page “objectives of the IRE course” is included, of which we retain the following relevant elements (p. 3):

1. To be open to a common future wherein universal dialogue and the particular are present;
2. To prepare to live in harmony with oneself, the other, and the wider environment;
3. To participate actively in social life, and in realization of oneself as an individual on an intellectual, social, affective, and moral level; and
4. To be a responsible citizen, creative, open to other cultures, able to take responsibility for the demands of life, aware of the complexity of society and capable of critical thinking.

The broad formulated objectives offer opportunities to apply the Hikmah Model in the Francophone IRE courses. Thus, starting from the subjects, the teacher can design lessons that aim at encouraging and strengthening the interconvictional competencies by means of the Hikmah pedagogy. As the Hikmah method favors questioning, debates and exchanges about real-life questions, which can arise in a plural and diverse class context. We can safely say that the IRE program is formulated in a sufficiently open manner and therefore offers opportunities to implement the Hikmah Model in IRE
classes and community activities. Hence, the development of qualitative lesson plans still is a big challenge for the IRE teachers, as the majority of them do not have a full higher education degree in IRE.

**Framework for Islamic religious education program for secondary education**

In 2013, the IRE Framework, titled ‘*Cours de Religion Islamique Référentiel de Compétences*’ (Islamic Religion Framework) was launched. This document includes specific learning outcomes for IRE, transversal learning outcomes, and common learning outcomes. Additionally, it contains two summary tables: terminal and subject-specific skills (p. 19) and transversal skills at primary and secondary level (pp. 51–55). For the third grade, there are twenty-five skills, further subdivided into methodological approaches, mental approaches, and relational skills and attitudes. It also explicitly includes passages regarding “interconvictional dialogue courses,” i.e. the common courses organized by the recognized life stances. Furthermore, it contains concepts and descriptions relating to the broader societal context in which Muslims live, such as living together, social cohesion, and freedom. We provide a non-exhaustive overview of the data that emerges from the analysis of the available documents.

First, the document contains references aimed at stimulating and strengthening the interconvictional skills of the pupils. Given that the IRE Framework (EMB 2013) is a joint initiative of the various leaders of religion courses, it is not strange to find many references directly and indirectly linked to the concepts interconvictional dialogue skills, living together, open-mindedness, respect, or even tolerance and pluralism. This document explicitly refers to the various legal documents concerning recognized religion and the non-religious life stances. The Decrees apply in all schools, regardless of the umbrella organization to which they belong.

The Missions Decree defines four priorities for primary and secondary education (Conseil de la Communauté Française, M.B. July 24, 1997). Two priorities should be noted in particular: to make young people able to take an active place in economic, social, and cultural life, and to prepare them to be responsible citizens in a democratic, united, pluralist society open to other cultures. The general introduction also refers to the Decree defining the neutrality of education (M.B. 31 March 1994). The first article states that “(…) the diversity of ideas is accepted, the spirit of tolerance is developed, and everyone is prepared for their role as citizens in a pluralist society” (p. 5). The Missions Decree, the Decree establishing the Superior Council of Philosophical Courses and the Citizenship Decree, stipulates “(…) create spaces for encounters, meetings, exchanges, discussions and engagement” (p. 6).

The Council Decree of Philosophical Courses (MB 07/29/2005, article 2, §2) stipulates that “the mission of the council is: to formulate, with respect for the specificities of each and within the framework of the Missions Decree, all proposals likely to encourage dialogue between the various recognized religions and the non-confessional moral course and to promote common values (4); to formulate, in accordance with the decree, any opinion on the organization of activities organized jointly by the various

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1Islamic, Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, and Protestant; www.embnet.be/sites/default/files/enseignement_-_referentiel_de_competences_0.pdf
philosophical courses around themes set by the council (5) (p. 6).” Furthermore, (…) “the school head in education organized by the French Community or the Organizing Authority ensures that it is developed and implemented at least once during each cycle of the educational continuum (…) an interdisciplinary activity which enforces the education for responsible and active citizenship (pp. 6–7); (…) the development and implementation of the targeted activities bring together students enrolled in courses in different philosophies [life stances] under the tutelage of teachers responsible for these courses working in partnership (p. 7).

These Decree elements are an anchoring point for teachers, allowing them to set up qualitative common courses in order to stimulate and strengthen interconvictional dialogue skills of all pupils. These conditions open up the possibility of implementing the Hikmah pedagogy. In other words, we find explicit references that encourage interdisciplinary activity regarding responsible and active citizenship and make it mandatory. The Hikmah pedagogy has as its final objectives to train pupils to be able to take their responsibilities in society, to integrate the skills acquired in other general courses, and to engage in a meta-reflection. We observe a parallel with the terminal, disciplinary, and common skills for the third grade of secondary school included in the document. The second chapter includes general themes and values that are common to all life stances, such as freedom, responsibility, ethics, openness (of mind, toward others), solidarity, peace. The Hikmah pedagogy advocates the same values.

Furthermore, the mentioned themes such as exchange and dialogue, awareness of the dynamics of a plural society and a multicultural environment, reflection on otherness and multicultural changes, the skills to be able to lead a debate, the rules of decorum and respect, the ability to use (reliable) resources, the development of a point of view to argue, understanding the richness of living together, and different cultures and interactions, are in line with the Hikmah pedagogy, as the context for which it was developed is also multicultural and multireligious. This reinforces the idea of being able to implement the Hikmah pedagogy in Islamic religion classes and, possibly, in common classes and activities. In order for the Hikmah pedagogy to be successful and achieve its objectives, it is imperative that teachers prepare lessons with full knowledge, i.e. by having an in-depth knowledge of active pedagogies, effective didactic methods, and of the diverse and plural world in which young people live.

With regard to terminal competencies, we retain the following elements (pp. 15–18):

1. Develop an analysis based on the Islamic framework and plan an action in order to initiate a contextual dynamic. This point requires that the pupil knows how to make a personal reading of a given situation while remaining faithful to the Islamic religious tradition, in the interconvictional respec.
2. Stimulate the pupil to find a reasoned solution and to position himself/herself with an open mind when confronted with opposing points of view (prejudices, stereotypes, ecumenism, …), thus promoting nonviolent communication.
3. Ask relevant questions and provide solutions to current problems and prepare for civic action.
Here, too, one of the cornerstones of the Hikmah model is to teach pupils to debate and argue on societal problems with others, and this while respecting certain rules such as: respect, argumentation, analysis, the expression of their point of view, etc., all taking into account the social, cultural, and dynamic context in which they live.

We enter the heart of the subject with the next principle: “practice interconvictional dialogue” (p. 27), that explicitly mentions that “democracy implies dialogue between the different actors of society” and that “intercultural education or interconvictional dialogue must build bridges between the actors of dialogue in the same way interdisciplinary builds bridges between islands of knowledge.” The IRE Framework of 2013 includes (in)direct compulsory learning objectives which can be anchor points to in which to implement the Hikmah Model. Given the Belgian/Francophone multiconvictional context, the Hikmah pedagogy carries interesting and relevant elements that can be integrated and applied during religion courses and common courses. Hikmah pedagogy aims to educate and train responsible citizens who are tolerant and capable of facing the cultural, religious, and political challenges of society. It is for this reason that the Hikmah pedagogy is not limited to a particular course but is integrated in language courses and Moral Education (Preece and Juperi 2014). The objective is also to improve socio-communicative skills, cognitive thinking, critical thinking, and collaboration skills (Yusoff 2018). This leads us to assert that the Hikmah pedagogy has the potential to achieve and stimulate the interconvictional (dialogue) skills, as mentioned throughout the Framework, i.e. the chapter containing skills to be built within common courses and in collaboration between life stances, but also the paragraphs relating to the openness to the other (p. 11), commitment and investment in a responsible manner (p. 12), dialogue and confrontation of different points of view in religious and philosophical matters (p. 16), citizen action vis-à-vis current issues (p. 16), practice interconvictional dialogue (pp. 26–27) and engage in participatory citizenship (p. 29). Furthermore, under relational skills and attitudes (p. 54) it states: (A) Skills related to self-reliance, (B) Skills related to knowing and respecting others, and (C) Skills related to living together.

These can be seen as anchor points to stimulate and strengthen the interconvictional skills of pupils. This can be done both within the framework of during specific religion lessons, and during common activities. However, we would like to point out a drawback: since there is no didactic pedagogical framework, the quality and content of the courses depend on the teacher’s background and skills. To conclude: the contextual and social framework, the objectives, and the skills appearing in the Framework are superimposed on the principles of the Hikmah pedagogy.

Discussion

The international context prompts a rethinking of life stances courses, especially since the one-hour philosophy and citizenship course has been compulsory since the 2017–2018 school year. The super socially diverse school context has led the actors to reflect and formulate a framework to stimulate and strengthen the interconvictional dialogue skills of the pupils. The IRE Framework (2013) is launched as a response to the need for an updated framework for the development of skills for interconvictional dialogue competencies. It also describes the role of Muslim citizens in Belgian society,
more specifically it contains references and descriptions relating to the broader societal context in which Muslims live, underlining the importance of, for instance, living together peacefully, social cohesion, and freedom. The current needs and societal context of the current Muslim generation are clearly different from those of the previous one (IRE program, 2010).

We conduct an exploratory qualitative textual and thematic analysis of the two official documents: the IRE program (2010) and the IRE Framework (2013) applied in French-speaking upper secondary education (fifth and sixth year)8 in order to map the elements referring to the interconvictional competencies. More specifically, do the IRE program (2010) and IRE Framework (2013) include elements to stimulate and strengthen the interconvictional dialogue skills and citizenship of secondary third grade students during the IRE courses and common courses? Can the Hikmah Model be a tool capable of developing interconvictional dialogue skills and citizenship of upper secondary education students during the specific and the common lessons for all recognized life stances? To do so, we analyze the theoretical possibilities for implementing the Hikmah Model in French-speaking IRE in third grade secondary education. The Hikmah Model, based on Lipman’s P4C (Lipman 1988), introduces new elements: the philosophy of the Qur’an, the hadiths, and the cultural customs of the Malays (Hashim, Hussien, and Imran 2014). This model aims to engage pupils, stimulate, strengthen, and develop skills such as critical and creative thinking, and strengthen listening, active participation in group discussions, socialization and communication skills, to develop and strengthen tolerance and respect among students in a rich environment (Roux 2012; Vermeer 2010; Ter Avest and McDougall 2014; Agten 2011). We emphasize that philosophizing is much more than initiating group discussions. Teachers must master the learning method and stimulate questioning of students through relevant and vivid stories (Hashim and Banging 2009). The Hikmah method encourages reflecting on and addressing religious themes, and in doing so contributes to positive intra- and interconvictional dialogue. The teacher competencies involved are, therefore, described as decisive for having positive effects in the learning process of pupils (Skeie et al. 2013, Sahin 2013).

Regarding pedagogic frameworks, the IRE program (2010) contains one page describing the objectives of the course of Islamic religion.” The IRE Framework includes a more extensive educational guideline. It explicitly distinguishes between terminal, course-specific and common disciplinary skills, as well as transversal skills, and categorizes skills related to methodological approaches, reasoning approaches, and relational skills and attitudes. This categorization allows us to analyze the possibilities for the implementation of the Hikmah Model.

The IRE Framework (2013) refers to the Council Decree of Philosophy Courses, which encourages dialogue between the constitutionally recognized life stances. We find opportunities and anchor points for philosophizing with pupils in the IRE Framework (2013). Philosophizing about Qur’anic verses and hadiths might prompt pupils to reflect on the meaning of the verses in the contemporary Western context. Comparing (religious) stories of different life stances helps pupils compare, exchange information, listen

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8Fifth and sixth year of secondary education: the students are between 16 and 18 years old. Cf. Appendix for a conversion table: BE – USA – UK.
and think critically, and engage in dialogue about similarities and differences. Even between pupils from the same cultural background in the same class, interesting discussions can arise on the differences of religious or non-religious practices. All of these moments can be used by the qualified teacher to strengthen and improve interconvincational dialogue and students’ social and communication skills through the Hikmah Model.

However, we must be careful not to overlook societal differences between Malaysian and Francophone society. Nevertheless, Francophone schools offer a rich environment for experimentation with the Hikmah model. We note that the dialogue skills are also worked on in the own life stance lessons in order to prepare students for the common activities. This underlines the possibility of stimulating and reinforcing the intra- and inter-convincational dialogue skills both during specific and joint classes through the Hikmah Model. To achieve this objective, additional studies are necessary to develop a Hikmah Model adapted and tailor-made for the Belgian/Francophone context. The drawback is that the quality and content of lessons depend on the teacher’s background and skills. Qualitative three-year full-fledged bachelor training for IRE teachers that includes a solid background knowledge of interdisciplinary learning and skills development is essential, which until now is not provided.

**Conclusion**

This article focuses on the Francophone secondary education system, more specifically on the interconvincational competencies in the IRE program (EMB 2010) and the IRE Framework (Exécutif des Musulmans de Belgique 2013) applied. We define interconvincational dialogue as “an active and conscious encounter between persons with different religious and convictional backgrounds.” To answer the research questions we analyze two key documents systematically: the IRE program and IRE Framework. The IRE program (2010) contains broadly formulated subjects. As a consequence, the teacher has many possibilities to work on the interconvincational dialogue competencies of the pupils via the Hikmah Model. Regarding the IRE Framework (2013) we observe that the specific, common, and transversal learning outcomes overlap those of the Hikmah Model, which opens up possibilities to implement the Hikmah Model in IRE courses. We can conclude that both documents include a significant number of anchor points to work with in order to stimulate, foster, and strengthen the interconvincational competencies of pupils using the Hikmah Model.

We have made reasonable choices, considering the feasibility of this research and taking into consideration the limits imposed. Nevertheless, improvements can be made to this research. The limitations listed obliged us to approach the obtained results with the necessary critical attitude, as this research is limited to theoretical analysis. The nature of the socio-educational subject favor and require observations in schools. In this type of research, fieldwork is the most appropriate qualitative empirical method to gain insight into the practice of teachers and to gain a clear insight into the learning process of pupils in terms of interconvincational dialogue, as well as for empirically determining the constraints and possibilities of the Hikmah Model. Due to the COVID-19 situation, it was not possible to carry out fieldwork in the schools, as these were closed from mid-
March 2020 until August 2021; third graders were provided (almost) the entire school year with distance learning, and only essential professionals were allowed into schools from September 1, 2020 until June 10, 2021. Follow-up field research is needed to analyze the possibilities of the Hikmah Model by introducing a piloting plan during IRE and common classes in secondary schools, which consist of testing the theoretical assumptions in a real Francophone classroom environment.

Disclosure statement

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Appendix

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>UK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Nursery</td>
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<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Reception</td>
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<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
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<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
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<td>Grade 2</td>
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<td>Year 4</td>
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<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
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