



Religion and Spirituality in Public Schools of Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

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INTRODUCTION

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a search for national and religious identities started in the post-Soviet countries, including Muslim-majority former Soviet republics. In the independent states of Central Asia, the role of Islam has been significant in the pursuit of ideological and national identity, particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which created a vacuum (Khalid, 2014; Thibault, 2018). The practice of Islam has witnessed significant growth in the republics over the past two decades. However, due to a lack of experience and an inadequate number of qualified religious leaders, the religious communities of the Central Asian republics could not play a dominant role in this process. Instead, both moderate and radical religious circles from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf states have played an active role in

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promoting their brand of Islam using various methods, including education, charity, and humanitarian support (Aliyev, 2004). Despite the state's tight control over religion, there has been an upsurge in radical forms of Islam, particularly in the area of religious education. Furthermore, it is important to note that the political and societal landscape in Central Asia is still significantly influenced by the seven-decade-long Soviet rule, which has left a lasting impact on the perception of religion's role in society. The strong secular legacy of the USSR has led to a limited emphasis on religious education (Thibault, 2015). On the one hand, religion is almost completely separated from the state and the educational system in Central Asia; on the other hand, the need for religious education is very high in society, especially among young people. For example, in Tajikistan, the relationship between the state and religion is moderate, and many Muslim students have pursued their studies in Pakistan. In Kyrgyzstan, Islam has been radicalized, while Christianity has become more missionary-oriented (International Crisis Group (ICG), 2003). In 2017, the subject "History of Religious Culture" was introduced into the public school curriculum in Kyrgyzstan (Topogeldiyeva, 2018), while in state schools in Kazakhstan, religious theology is not taught as a separate subject. Instead, a course on the history and culture of religion is provided. For instance, Saydumanova (2018) notes that since 2016, compulsory teaching of religious studies has been introduced in the public schools of Kazakhstan.

In 1991, the Uzbekistani Republic defined its development strategy based on international covenants and human rights conventions, and as a secular democratic state, the activities of religious institutions have been transferred to non-governmental organizations. Religion, mainly Islam, is a part of the local history, culture, and social life. Islam emerged in society not as a religious doctrine, but as a system of national spiritual values in terms of the educational impact of the development of society (Yunusova, 2002).

Religious education about religious scriptures and practices is not taught as a separate subject at public or private schools (ICG, 2003). According to the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the inclusion of religious subjects as instruction in faith in the curriculum is prohibited, but the subjects that provide information about the morality and history and culture of world religions are allowed. Currently, public schools in Uzbekistan provide some insight into the world's religions as part of their moral course based on theology: "*Din asoslari*" [fundamentals of religion]; "*Dunyo dinlari tarixi*" [history of world religions]; "*Tarbiya*"

[upbringing]; “*Odobnoma*” [etiquette]; “*Eski uzbek yozuvi*” [old Uzbek script]; “*Adabiyot*” [literature]; “*Tarix*” [history]; “*Dunyo dinlari tarixi*” [history of world religions]; “*Vatan tuyg’usi*” [Patriotism]; “*Ma’naviyat asoslari*” [fundamentals of spirituality].

My analysis of the policy and strategies of teaching religion within public education in Uzbekistan over the last 30 years rests on archives and legal documents. This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: How has education policy in relation to religious education evolved over the last 30 years in Uzbekistan? What does the normative framework say about freedom of religion and teaching instruction in faith in public schools? Additionally, I seek to take a closer look at the position of religion in the school curriculum, particularly in terms of hours allocated to its study, the content covered, and textbooks used in courses dedicated to religious education. Finally, who has responsibility for developing curricula and the content of religious education textbooks.

RELIGION, STATE, AND SOCIETY IN INDEPENDENT UZBEKISTAN

In the decades since Uzbekistan gained independence, the country has undergone a process of spiritual and educational restoration aimed at helping citizens find their own identity and develop national consciousness in line with democratic principles. Islam plays a significant role in Uzbek society, where its beliefs are intertwined with culture, ideas, ideology, child-rearing, and customs (Yunusova, 2002; Yusupov, 2015). This close relationship between Islam and society has set the standards for education for thousands of years and has served as a means of articulating a national ideology. Spirituality and religion are considered both national and cultural, while ideology and politics represent the interests of certain social groups (Abdurahmonov et al., 2001). In this regard, spirituality refers to issues related to Islamic culture and ethics in Uzbek society. The focus was on the role of Islamic traditions in educating young people in terms of national ideology (ICG, 2003; Seraphine, 2018).

In Uzbekistan, religion is officially separated from the state (article 7. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations), although one might question if it is also separated from society (Karimov, 1996). Sunni Islam is the predominant religion in Uzbekistan, and public moral and ethical norms stem directly from Islamic teachings and play a vital role in the spiritual life of the population. Most

Muslims in Uzbekistan follow the Hanafi school of thought, known for its adaptability to local customs and rituals and recognition of scientific and technological advances (Abdurahmonov et al., 2001; Aliyev, 2004). The National Center of Human Rights reports that there are 2,323 religious organizations in the country, belonging to 16 sects, with 2,132 being Islamic and 191 being non-Islamic organizations, such as Christian, Jewish, Baha'i, Krishna Consciousness Society, and a Buddhist temple. There is also an interfaith Bible Society in the country (Tulyakov, 2023). However, there is no official registration of believers, and the Statistics Committee report does not cover which religion individuals follow. Nevertheless, the Committee of Religious Affairs (CORA) reports that 94% of the population follows Islam, with approximately 3.5% following Christian Orthodoxy and the rest following other denominations (Yusupov, 2022).

The above debates about the role of religious education notwithstanding, the field of religious education in Uzbekistan is organized in three capacities: professional religious education in the field of theology (madrasas, Tashkent Islamic Institute, seminaries); academic education in religion in secular educational institutions (including public schools and higher education) (ICG, 2003); and domestic religious education settings in which the intent is to study the rules of religious practice, which are of interest to the population and considered necessary for daily life, and to acquire knowledge based on religious views on issues related to morality. Mainly, it is provided in the family and only parents are allowed to provide religious education to their children (Komilov, 2021; Yusupov, 2017).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is a parallel discourse on the role religion plays in the education of a secular state in general. The question of religious education has been and still is the subject of particularly intense and controversial debate (Fratelli, 2013; , Lähnemann et al., 2009; Seligman, 2004).

Religious education about faith in public schools has an impact on society and, in some cases, plays a strong formative role. Many criteria can be used to distinguish the main solutions which have been adopted. A macro-distinction is that of a denominational vs. non-denominational approach toward religion as a specific subject in school curricula. These two different options can be named: “education into religion(s)” and “education about religion(s)” (Jackson, 2007; Schreiner, 2009).

Fratelli (2013) argued that the post-secular idea is the possibility for schools and religious organizations to learn from each other by inhabiting the same public space and participating in shared practices. Lähnemann and Schreiner (2009) argue that religious education and interreligious learning can serve as a key agent in helping people find direction in their lives and actions. Another feature of methodologies in education on religious studies is the interpretive models on which the analysis of religious phenomena and resources in the school textbooks are discussed (Seligman, 2004).

There are three types of religious education that are relevant to the study. Education in faith, i.e., how to be a pious member of your religion, education about religion, i.e., teaching world religion and moral education, which is akin to civics (Chazan, 1985).

Religious education about faith can be delivered in public school settings in two ways. Firstly, instruction in faith can be delivered to students in their own religious confession, contributing to the construction of students' religious identity and their integration into the cultural and spiritual realms to which they belong (Brandt, 2013). Furthermore, it helps and develops the ability to distinguish right from wrong, to act on this distinction and to experience pride when we do the right things and guilt when we are engaged in wrongdoings, which in turn shape one's morality. Engaging with religion can contribute to developing personal orientation and identity formation. This applies to education in religious communities as well as in public education. Secondly, religious education can offer students knowledge about religions in an informative, neutral way while equally acknowledging different religious traditions. It is evident that the majority of the population in Uzbekistan consists of Muslims. However, due to the secular nature of the state, the objective of incorporating religious education in schools is to facilitate the assimilation of religious knowledge among young individuals based on principles of diversity and tolerance. It is important to note that religious knowledge encompasses more than just faith; it can promote awareness of different worldviews, their cultural and moral implications and their contribution to human rights, and thus contribute to a tolerant attitude as a prerequisite for harmonious coexistence. In light of this concept, it becomes essential to analyze the specific elements that should be included in the educational process when teaching about religion in the context of Uzbekistan. By incorporating these elements, students can engage in reflective thinking and ultimately form their own perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

This study combines archival research with analysis of textbooks used for teaching religious education in schools. Archival research helps to see the evolution and dynamics of state policy about teaching religion in public schools. The archival findings reflect the most important features of the field for a period of 30 years between 1991 and 2022.

The analysis comprises the processing of qualitative data extracted from the school curricula, decrees, and laws and classified into several sub-categories (Halai & Durrani, 2021). Additionally, where appropriate, I use statistics in the legal documents of the government and the school curricula.

My qualitative methodology was iterative. Firstly, I identified search terms which captured the key dimensions, including religion, education, religious, political economy contexts, and conflict-affected states. Next, I searched several databases, including the National Archive of Uzbekistan (NAUz), the Archive of Republican Educational Center and electronic databases of development agencies, including the National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Policy analysis uses political viability, evaluation, and equity criteria, and studies are selected for in-depth review. The extracted data is then thematized, analyzed, and synthesized to draw conclusions. This stage aims to critically and constructively relate the program-related literature with broader insights into religious education in public schools in Uzbekistan.

FINDINGS

Legal Framework of Religious Education in Uzbekistan

The Republic of Uzbekistan is a signatory to more than 60 international legal documents in human rights (including six UN documents). In addition, it has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which specifically mention ensuring subjects such as the general history of religion and ethics are covered in public schools if provided in a neutral and objective way. The freedom of parents or legal guardians to ensure that their children receive a religious and moral upbringing that corresponds to their beliefs is related to the guarantee of freedom of religion or belief (Yunusova, 2002).

Several legislative acts have been developed to pursue its secular democratic stance (Yunusova, 2002). For example, Table 4.1 highlights several clauses related to education and religious education in the Constitution, as well as other laws and regulations that govern these areas. For example, the Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to believe in any religion or not to believe in any religion, and religious organizations are separated from the state and equal before the law. The Law on Freedom of Conscience of May 1, 1998 (new version in 1998, 2021), prohibits the inclusion of religious subjects in the curriculum of the education system (except for religious educational institutions). It should be mentioned that in accordance with international child rights norms, Article 5 of the Declaration of the UN guarantees all children “the right to education in matters of religion or belief according to the wishes of their parents”, and Article 6 guarantees the right to “teach religion or belief in places suitable for this purpose”. Besides that, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “On Education”, recognizes the freedom to choose the form of education, non-discrimination in education, ensuring equal education opportunities, the inculcation of national and universal values in education and upbringing, and the harmony of state and public administration in the education system. This reflects a commitment to providing quality education that promotes both national and universal values, and ensuring that everyone has equal access to education regardless of their background or beliefs. However, teaching religion in public schools is not mentioned anywhere.

It appears that the Uzbekistan government has recently gone through a shift in its policies toward religion and religious education. On August 23, 2019, the government noted that it is necessary to introduce a single subject, “*Tarbiya*” (Upbringing), with a focus on educating the younger generation in the spirit of national pride and patriotism. Overall, the government appears to be prioritizing religious values and morality in education and society (Conception of curriculum “*Tarbiya*”, retrieved March 2, 2023). Extensive efforts have been made to educate the populace on religious values, strongly emphasizing morality.

Religious Education as a School Subject in Public Education

The teaching of religion in educational institutions of Uzbekistan took a new turn in transition period and emphasizes the deep study and widespread promotion of moderate teachings of Islam (Nuritdinov,

Table 4.1 Legislation acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan on education and religion between 1991 and 2021

<i>Education policy</i>	<i>Clauses on universal education</i>
Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019	Article 31 of the Republic of Uzbekistan guarantees freedom of conscience and the “right to believe in any religion or not to believe in any religion” Article 18 of the Constitution generally prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, among others. Forced assimilation of religious views is not allowed Article 61 of the Constitution states, “Religious organizations and associations are separated from the state and are equal before the law” and “the state does not interfere in the activities of religious associations”
The International Congress organized by UNESCO in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 2000. (Xusniddinov, 2002)	Highlighted the importance of studying and understanding religions at all levels of education, and emphasized the role of UNESCO in promoting peace and condemning all forms of extremism and terrorism
The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and Religious Organizations of May 1, 1998, (new versions 2008, 2021) https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-5491534	Article 7. Separation of religion from the state. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, religion is separated from the state
The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations of May 1, 1998, (new versions 2008, 2021) https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-5491534	Article 8, which is also the basis of religious education, recommends separation of the state education system in the Republic of Uzbekistan from religion and religious organizations, and prohibits the inclusion of religious subjects in the curriculum of the education system (except for religious educational institutions), is not allowed. Private religious education is prohibited

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

<i>Education policy</i>	<i>Clauses on universal education</i>
The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, “On Education” adopted on 1997 (new version 2020) (https://lex.uz/docs/5700831)	Recognizes the freedom to choose the form of education, non-discrimination in education, ensuring equal education opportunities, the inculcation of national and universal values in education and upbringing and harmony of state and public administration in the education system
Criminal Code the Republic of Uzbekistan is approved by the law. On 22 September 1994, 2012-XII in the acts from April 1, 1995 (O’zbekiston Oliy kengashining Axborotnomasi, 1995, No. 1. pp. 21–22)	Article 145 highlights the violation of freedom of conscience. Teaching a child about religion, forming a religious conviction in them and thereby involving them in religious activities against the will of the child, the consent and desire of his parents or legal guardians
Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated August 22, 2003 No. 364 (See more, https://lex.uz/docs/-866710:ONDATE=22.08.2003%2000)	“On the provision of social assistance and benefits for further improvement of spiritual and educational work in the field of religion”. the subject of educational hours was considered
The law of Ministry of High education and Ministry of Public education on 12 April 2017 (Archive of Republican Educational Center)	Improvement in the teaching of religious sciences
Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated April 16, 2018 No. PF-5416 (See more. https://lex.uz/docs/-3686277)	“On measures to radically improve the activities of the religious and educational sphere”
The Regulation of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, May 2018	“On the course of reading the Koran and Tajweed” was approved
Video selection was held on the problems of education on August 23, 2019. (Xalq so’zi, 2019)	It was noted that it is necessary to introduce a single subject, “Education”, combining such disciplines as “History of Religions”, “Sense of Homeland”

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

<i>Education policy</i>	<i>Clauses on universal education</i>
On July 6, 2020, the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted Resolution No. 422 (See more. https://lex.uz/ru/docs/-4885018)	“On measures to gradually introduce the subject of Education” “in general secondary education combining the disciplines “Ethics”, “Sense of Fatherland”, “Fundamentals of National Independence and Spirituality” and “History of World Religions”
On May 11, 2022, Decree Of the President of Uzbekistan dated No. PF-134 (See more. https://nrm.uz/content?doc=691904_o'zbekiston_respublikasi_prezident_ining_11_05_2022_y_pq-241-son_halq_tali_mini_rivojlantirishga_oid_qo'shimcha_choratadbirlar_to'g'risidagi_qarori&products=1)	“On approval of the national program for the development of public education in 2022–2026” include the questions of measures on teaching spirituality in public schools

1998). In the general curriculum, the subjects in which the foundations of religious education are integrated are taught in the section of various subjects in the 1st to 11th grades. From the academic year 1992–1993, the history of religion was included in the hours allocated to the general history course. Based on the order of the Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan (Minister J.G. Yuldoshev), on September 24, 1992, No. 276, it was stated that “*Din asoslari*” (Fundamentals of Religious Studies) was to be taught in secondary schools and the issue of organizing short-term training courses for lecturers (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 4, l.109–111). This approach focuses on the moderate teachings of Islam and promoting religious enlightenment among young people. This is achieved by including the history of religion in the general history course and teaching the fundamentals of religious studies, sociology, and the history of the people of Uzbekistan in secondary schools. According to the report of the Ministry of Public Education, there were 8,524 schools in the republic in 1992, where 4,611,800 students studied (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 23, l.32).

In 1992, the Ministry of Public Education introduced curricula in schools based on religion that aimed to cultivate a sense of pride in Uzbekistan’s cultural and historical heritage among the younger generation. It is interesting to note that the reintroduction of the old Uzbek script in schools was part of a broader effort to revive the national identity and promote the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan. The decision to teach

courses on the history of religion, theology, and ethics, as well as the use of Arabic script in some optional courses, highlights the importance of religion and traditional values for Uzbek society (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 13, l. 30, Archive of Republican educational center registered on October 28, 1992).

In this regard, textbooks and school lessons include sections on moral standards to teach religious studies as a means of teaching about religion, emphasizing the spiritual, and enlightening aspects of Islam. The primary form is conducted in secondary education institutions, where the teaching of religion is approached from an academic perspective rather than a theological one. The main type of religious education in Uzbekistan is conducted in secondary schools as a moral course based on theology: *dinshunoslik* [religious studies]; *dunyo dinlari tarixi* [history of world religions]; *tarbiya* [upbringing]; *odobnoma* [etiquette]; *eski uzbek yozuvi* [old Uzbek script]; *adabiyot* [literature]; *tarix* [history]; *dunyo dinlari tarixi* [history of world religions]. These subjects provide information about religious history, and major world and national religions, their worship and rituals described from an academic perspective and based on Islamic moral norms. On the other hand, special state religious institutions, such as madrasas, teach disciplines such as world religions to train imams with religious tolerance toward other religions (Islomov, 2008). The goal is to form a comprehensive civic Uzbekistani personality and build an ideological immunity against religious fundamentalism that does not align with national spirituality (ICG, 2003; Seraphine, 2018).

Table 4.2 shows the changes in the curriculum for grades 1–11 in Uzbekistan over several years. The subjects, grades, and number of hours per program are listed for each academic year. It is interesting to note that the curriculum has undergone some changes over time, with some subjects being removed. The last column indicates the number of hours allocated to each subject in the given academic year. The table also includes references to various sources for the information presented. From 1991 to 1992, “*Odobnoma*” (etiquette) was taught to grades 1–4 for 17 hours out of a total of 68 hours. In addition, *Old Uzbek writing* based on Arabic writing was taught to grades 2–4 for 34 hours, and “*Vatan tuygusi*” (patriotism) was taught to grades 5–6. From 1992 to 1995, the curriculum was expanded to include more subjects such as history, literature, and religion for grades 5–8. The number of hours allocated to the curriculum increased to 85 hours. From grades 9 to 11, the curriculum included “*Dunyo dinlari tarixi*” (History of World Religions)

for 34 hours. In 1999, “*Ma’naviyat asoslari*” (the basics of spirituality) was added to the curriculum for grades 7–9 for 34 hours. In 2001, “*Milliy istiqlol g’oyasi*” (National Independence Idea) and “*Uzbekiston konstitutsiyasi*” (Constitution of Uzbekistan) were added for 34 hours. In 2019, “*Tarbiya*” (Upbringing) was introduced, and all the above-mentioned subjects were excluded from the curriculum for grades 1–11. Finally, it is important to note that the hours per program for each year remained consistent at 34 hours.

It is worth noting that the inclusion of these subjects in the school curriculum reflects the Uzbekistan government’s commitment to the holistic development of students, not just in terms of academic knowledge but also in their personal growth and character formation. Moreover, the emphasis on respecting national values and cultural diversity highlights the country’s efforts to promote social harmony and inclusivity, and to foster a sense of national unity among its diverse population. By educating young people on these principles, Uzbekistan hopes to build a more tolerant and harmonious society where different cultures and traditions are respected and celebrated.

The Politics of Textbooks in Religious Studies

Religious teaching and morality are introduced into the public schools of Uzbekistan as a secular-modernized concept, defined as part of national culture. The harmonious combination of ideas of interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural tolerance, the union of the spiritual and the secular, describes the creation of the foundations of religious education in a modern political legal society in Uzbekistan. These above-mentioned conceptual questions were covered in school textbooks in the courses of teaching religion about faith. The textbooks contain some texts on religion, mainly Islam, and examples from various religious narratives aimed at conveying feelings of humanity, patriotism, respect for parents, and mutual kindness between people.

If we look through the debates over the textbooks for teaching about religion in public schools, the Minister of Public Education of Uzbekistan, CORA, the Republican Education Center, and the Tashkent Islamic University (now the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan) are responsible for textbooks in the field of religion in public schools. The elaboration of textbooks is followed by the principle, “Secularism is not atheism” (Archive of Republican Educational Center).

Table 4.2 References of the curriculum for grades 1–11 in public schools of Uzbekistan

<i>Time</i>	<i>Ministerial order</i>	<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Hours per program</i>
1991–1992	NAUz, Fond M.26, op.1, d.2, ll. 212–217	“ <i>Odobnoma</i> ” (etiquette)	1–4	17/68
	NAUz, fond M. 26, op.1, d. 23, ll. 37	“ <i>Old Uzbek writing</i> ” based on Arabic writing	2–4 5–11	34 70
1995	NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d.2, ll. 212–217	“ <i>Vatan tugʻusi</i> ” (patriotism)	5–6	52
		“ <i>Tarixdun bikojalar</i> ” (Stories from history),	5–8	85
		“ <i>Adabiyot</i> ” (Literature), “ <i>Tarikh</i> ” (History), “ <i>Uzbekiston tarixi</i> ” (History of Uzbekistan),	9	34/68
		“ <i>Jahon tarixi</i> ” (World history)		34
1995	NAUz, fond M. 26, op.1, d. 23, ll. 37	“ <i>Din tarixi</i> ” (History of religion)	10	
		“ <i>Odobnoma</i> ” (Etiquette)	5–8, 11	34
1999	NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 836, ll. 112, 115	“ <i>Dinshunoslik asoslari</i> ” (The basics of religion),		
		“ <i>Inson va jamiyatshunoslik</i> ” (Human and Social Sciences)		
		“ <i>Uzbekiston xalqlari tarixi</i> ” (History of the peoples of Uzbekistan)	8–11	34
1999	NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d. 383, ll. 251–252	“ <i>Dunyo dinlari tarixi</i> ” (History of World Religions)	9–11	34
		“ <i>Maʼnaviyat asoslari</i> ” (The basics of spirituality)	7–9	34

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued)

<i>Time</i>	<i>Ministerial order</i>	<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Hours per program</i>
2001	NAUz, M. 37, op.1, d. 6175, ll. 2	<i>Mil'ly isiq'lol g'oyasi, Uzbekiston konstitutsiyasi</i>		34
2019	(Xalq so'zi, 2019)	“ <i>Tarbiya</i> ” (Upbringing) was introduced and all the above subjects were excluded from the curriculum	1–11	34

It should be noted that the preparation of textbooks is considered a serious task by the Ministry of Public Education with efforts. For example, on September 24, 1992, by the order of the approval of the selection committee for the evaluation of concepts and teaching aids in secondary schools in the subjects “*History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan*” and “*Fundamentals of Religious Studies*”, the council for textbook authors includes philosophers, historians, and sociologists from the Institute of History, the Pedagogical Institute, and Tashkent Technical University (NAUz, fond M.26, op.1, d.4, ll.109–111). However, the archive documents show that the council did not include specialists in the field of religion to prepare the textbooks.

The textbooks mentioned above focus on world religions, including Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam. While the approach to teaching about religion is confessional, the textbooks also emphasize the similarities and intercultural tendencies between religions. However, it partly presents intercultural tendencies in addition to this confessional character. The focus is mainly to show differences and similarities of each religion. In terms of visual content, we see images of great Arabic scholars, mosques, mausoleums, and historical places in the Islamic context. They are not portrayed with reference to Islamic sources to a great extent. Islam is described in more detail than other confessions, for example, when articulating its origins, sects, branches, and the development of science, art, culture, and spirituality in Muslim countries. Overall, the textbooks in Uzbekistan cover a wide range of topics related to religion and culture in different grades, focusing on ethics, national values, and the contributions of Muslim scientists to world science. While the approach to teaching about religion is confessional, the textbooks also emphasize intercultural tendencies and similarities between religions.

It should be noted that in previous years the textbook on the history of world religions was not taken into discussion by the authors and governmental agencies and published with the same thematic. These debates were raised during a period of internal conflict and turbulence associated with religious fundamentalism and terrorism (Tashkent 1999). For instance, on August 22, 2003, Decree No. 364 from the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the provision of social assistance and benefits for further improvement of spiritual and educational work in the field of religion”, declares that in the system of lifelong learning to create textbooks on subjects that acquaint young people with the history, teachings, and essence of religions and gradually introduce

them into the educational process (Archive of Republican Educational Center).

The evidence I have gathered indicates discussions between textbook authors on how to improve the quality and originality of the textbook. For example, Table 4.3 shows meetings of the textbook council emphasized problems in the content and context of the textbook “*History of World Religions*” published between 2002 and 2017 years.

Interestingly, the Decree of the President of Uzbekistan dated April 16, 2018, includes planned measures for radical improvement in the religious and educational sphere. Particularly, one of the measures (paragraph 7) eliminates existing shortcomings in the study of curricula and textbooks in the subjects “*History of world religions*”, “*Religious studies*”, and “*Spiritual and educational foundations for countering religious extremism and international terrorism*” in the system of public education. In comparison with the previous textbooks and curricula, the Decree indicates a more deliberate and systematic approach to the study of religion and religious extremism. Unlike the preceding book, the next 2019 year adopted the textbook “*Tarbiya*” (Upbringing), which directed the students to understand the basics of Islamic morality, the importance of family, learn good manners, and norms of behavior derived from religion, mainly from the canons of Islam. Nevertheless, this textbook does not cover direct teaching of instruction in religious faith.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the evolution of religious education in public schools in Uzbekistan emphasizes the need to address society’s demands for religious education, work on the prevention of radicalization, balance secularism, ensure inclusivity, while acknowledging the historical context. The implementation of religious education in these schools reflects a secular and nationalist approach, as the state maintains a separation from religious institutions and provides limited formal religious education. However, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the presence of Muslims in society, general education schools in Uzbekistan offer classes on religious history and culture. From 1991 to 2001, these subjects primarily provided general information, but since 2001, the teaching of religious subjects has undergone changes due to political factors such as the rise of regional radicalism and religious

Table 4.3 Textbook authors' discussions on "The History of World Religions"

<i>Textbook council</i>	<i>Discussions about textbook "The History of World Religions" (grade 9–11)</i>	<i>Source</i>
On May 29, 2016 Chairman of the CORA	(a) The textbook does not contain information about modern ideological dangers, such as extremist groups that use religion as a cover for their purposes	Archive of Republican Education Center
Tashkent Islamic University	(b) Teaching the subject does not meet today's requirements and does not fully reflect current issues	
	(c) The lack of necessary abilities of teachers in teaching this subject	
Ministry of Public Education	(d) 10% of teachers were non-specialists	
	(e) Teaching in the 9th grade was not sufficient for the age group, some topics in the program were repeated, and there was a lack of coherence and continuity in the curriculum	
	(f) Only the Uzbek language edition of the manual for the years 2002–2006 was available, and there was no textbook at all for schools where education was conducted in Russian and other languages	
2017, the Republican Educational Center	(j) New edition of the textbook focuses on educating and strengthening their ideological immunity which includes folk proverbs, wise words, and thoughts of thinkers related to universal and national values	Archive of Republican Educational Center

extremism. The curriculum's textbooks focus on providing an understanding of various religions rather than promoting any specific faith. The authors of these textbooks approach the history and culture of religion based on the region's historical context and territorial considerations. Given the significant role of Islam in the country's history, the textbooks contain substantial information about the history and teachings of Islam.

The government of Uzbekistan faces several challenges in providing religious education in public schools. While the country identifies as secular, religion remains intertwined with society. The teaching of religion is approached from an academic perspective, with an emphasis on promoting moderate teachings of Islam and instilling ideological immunity against religious fundamentalism. To address these challenges, teaching religion in public schools ensures that the curriculum is inclusive and covers different religions, while also respecting the secular nature of the state. As shown above, teaching about religion in public schools of Uzbekistan focus on national and moral education in the context of Islamic teachings, which helps to promote a sense of cultural and national identity among Uzbekistan's youth. However, it is important to ensure that such education is not used to promote radical or extremist views, and that it respects the diversity of beliefs and opinions.

The study also found that the government could work with religious leaders and organizations to develop a framework for religious education in public schools that takes into account the concerns of all stakeholders. This could involve establishing a committee or commission of representatives from different religions to guide the development and implementation of religious education programs in public schools. Furthermore, it would also make sense to organize an optional course religious studies course for high school students. Additionally, as archive documents show, schools sometimes lack qualified teachers of religious studies. Thus, the government could consider providing training and support to teachers to ensure that they are equipped to teach religious education in a way that promotes tolerance, respect, and understanding. This could involve developing teacher-training programs that focus on religious diversity, cultural sensitivity, and effective classroom management strategies. By implementing these strategies, Uzbekistan can provide students with a high-quality education that promotes tolerance, respect, and understanding of different religious beliefs and perspectives. This would contribute to the cultivation of national pride, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the development of a well-rounded education for the younger generation.

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