

Analysis of the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah Curriculum Design

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation of the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 01 Medan, focusing on its relevance, pedagogical practices, assessment systems, and supporting institutional factors. Using a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving teachers, students, parents, and school documents. The findings reveal that the AIK curriculum is perceived as normatively strong, emphasising akhlaq, ibadah, and Qur'anic understanding, yet remains limited in addressing contemporary issues, particularly digital ethics and media-literacy challenges commonly experienced by adolescents. Classroom practices were dominated by lecture-based instruction, although discussion and project-based learning were present in several sessions. Parental involvement in religious activities was relatively high, but communication regarding students' behavioural development was inconsistent. Assessment practices largely relied on written examinations, with minimal use of authentic or performance-based evaluations. Structural constraints including outdated textbooks, limited teacher professional development, and low technological integration, further hindered optimal curriculum enactment. Overall, the study concludes that while the AIK curriculum provides a solid normative foundation, its effectiveness is constrained by pedagogical, structural, and contextual limitations. The study recommends enriching the curriculum with contemporary Islamic digital-ethics content, strengthening teachers' capacities in student-centred and technology-supported pedagogies, improving communication systems with parents, and expanding authentic assessment methods. These improvements are expected to enhance the curriculum's relevance and its capacity to cultivate holistic Islamic character development aligned with the demands of the digital era.

Keyword : Al-Islam Kemuhammadiyah Curriculum; Student Character Formation.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi kurikulum Al-Islam dan Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) di SMP Muhammadiyah 01 Medan dengan menyoroti aspek relevansi kurikulum, praktik pedagogis, sistem asesmen, serta faktor kelembagaan yang mendukung pelaksanaannya. Menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan guru, siswa, orang tua, serta dokumen sekolah. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kurikulum AIK dipersepsikan memiliki kekuatan normative menekankan akhlaq, ibadah, dan pemahaman Al-Qur'an namun masih terbatas dalam mengakomodasi isu-isu kontemporer, terutama etika digital dan tantangan literasi media yang umum dialami oleh remaja. Praktik pembelajaran di

kelas didominasi metode ceramah, meskipun pembelajaran diskusi dan berbasis proyek ditemukan dalam beberapa sesi. Keterlibatan orang tua dalam kegiatan keagamaan relatif tinggi, tetapi komunikasi terkait perkembangan perilaku siswa masih tidak konsisten. Praktik asesmen cenderung bergantung pada ujian tertulis, dengan penggunaan asesmen autentik atau berbasis kinerja yang minimal. Kendala structural meliputi buku teks yang sudah kurang relevan dengan perkembangan, terbatasnya pelatihan profesional bagi guru, dan rendahnya integrasi teknologi semakin menghambat implementasi kurikulum secara optimal. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun kurikulum AIK memiliki fondasi normatif yang kuat, efektivitasnya masih dibatasi oleh kelemahan pedagogis, struktural, dan kontekstual. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengayaan kurikulum melalui penambahan materi etika digital dalam perspektif Islam, penguatan kapasitas guru dalam pedagogi berpusat pada peserta didik dan berbasis teknologi, peningkatan sistem komunikasi dengan orang tua, serta perluasan penggunaan asesmen autentik. Perbaikan ini diharapkan dapat meningkatkan relevansi kurikulum dan kemampuannya dalam menumbuhkan karakter Islami yang holistik dan sesuai dengan tuntutan era digital.

Kata kunci : Kurikulum Al-Islam Kemuhammadiyah; Pembentukan Karakter Siswa.

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Introduction

Education is a strategic instrument for developing human resources who are knowledgeable, morally grounded, and globally competitive. In the Islamic educational framework, the goal of education extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge; it encompasses the cultivation of character and personality rooted in Islamic values. This aligns with Al-Attas's view that Islamic education aims to produce the *insan adabi*—a good and virtuous human being—who embodies intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social integrity (Al-Attas, 2019). Achieving such an ideal requires a curriculum design that is holistic, relevant, and adaptive to contemporary societal changes.

Within the Muhammadiyah education system, the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) curriculum serves as a distinctive identity and a core component for nurturing students' religious, moral, and social character. Previous studies highlight the significant contribution of the AIK curriculum in strengthening Islamic values and shaping students' character (Akrim et al., 2022; Ginting & Setiawan, 2019; Syahputra, 2023). However, in the era of digital disruption, Islamic education must become more responsive to contemporary issues such as digital literacy, religious moderation, media exposure, and the socio-cultural challenges faced by young learners. Recent research indicates that traditional cognitive and normative approaches are no longer sufficient; instead, character education requires

contextual learning models, project-based approaches, and effective integration of digital technology (Hussam & Liyawu, 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025).

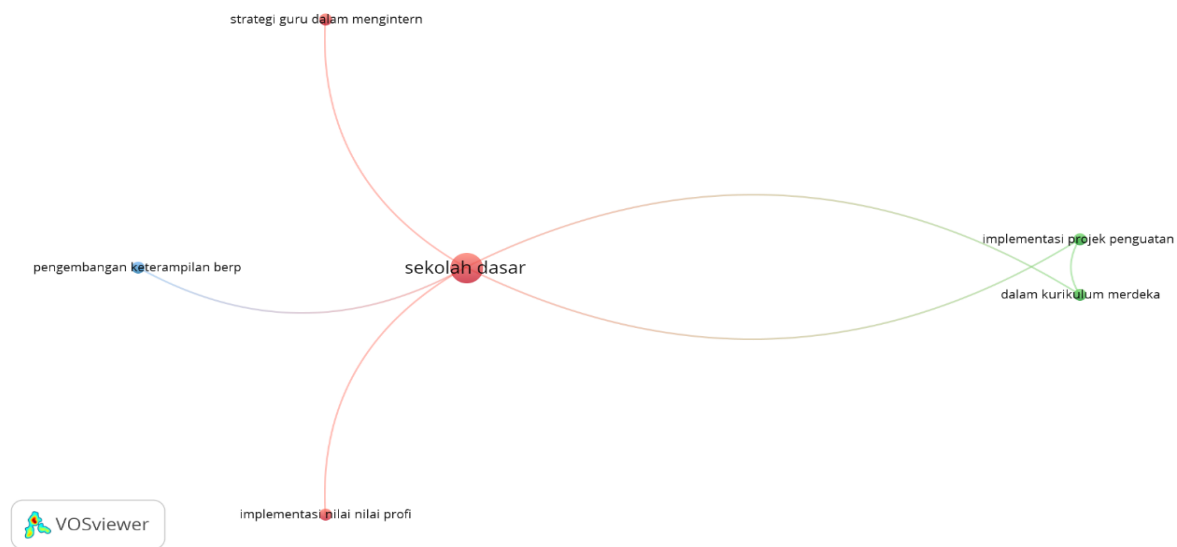
Despite the growing body of literature on Muhammadiyah education, findings from bibliometric mapping using *Publish or Perish* and *VOSviewer* reveal that most studies focus on the AIK curriculum at the elementary school level. Research at the junior high school level remains limited, even though early adolescence is a critical developmental phase in which moral, social, and religious identities begin to solidify. Students at this stage face heightened psychosocial pressures and more intensive exposure to digital content, necessitating a more contextually relevant and adaptive AIK curriculum compared to the elementary level. This gap has yet to be thoroughly addressed in previous scholarship.

In addition, existing studies rarely examine the design, implementation, and effectiveness of the AIK curriculum simultaneously, particularly at the junior high school level. Most research remains descriptive or emphasises normative aspects without evaluating the extent to which the AIK curriculum aligns with contemporary challenges faced by today's adolescents. Consequently, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis of how the AIK curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 01 Medan is constructed, implemented, and contributes to students' character formation.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by providing a conceptual and evaluative analysis of the AIK curriculum design at the junior high school level. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to Islamic curriculum development and offer practical recommendations for Muhammadiyah schools in strengthening an AIK curriculum that is more adaptive, progressive, and relevant to the character-building needs of today's young generation.

Research related to curriculum development is not a new area of study; therefore, the researcher conducted a mapping analysis using the *Publish or Perish* application and visualised the results using *VOSviewer*. The outcomes of this bibliometric mapping are presented as follows:

Figure 1. Research Mapping Using VosViewer



The figure above illustrates that research related to curriculum in Muhammadiyah schools has predominantly focused on topics such as the implementation of Pancasila Student Profile values (Suryaningsih & Desstya, 2023; Wahjusaputri et al., 2024), the development of critical thinking skills (Annam et al., 2024; Suwandi, 2020), teacher strategies in internalizing Muhammadiyah values (Saprun et al., 2025), and project-based implementation (Arifah & Utami, 2023; Laili et al., 2024; Pramesti et al., 2024). In addition, several studies examine the Independent Curriculum (Azhari & Albina, 2024; Nandang et al., 2023; Prihatini, 2022). Most of these studies were conducted at the Muhammadiyah elementary school level, as evidenced by the bibliometric mapping generated through the VOSviewer application. Therefore, this study is considered important as it seeks to examine the design of the Al-Islam Kemuhammadiyah curriculum implemented in Muhammadiyah junior high schools (SMP).

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relevance, implementation, and effectiveness of the Al-Islam Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 01 Medan. The case study design was selected because it allows the researcher to investigate educational phenomena holistically by examining contextual conditions, processes, and stakeholder interactions within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2023). This approach also enables an in-depth exploration of how the AIK curriculum is enacted in practice and experienced by those directly involved.

The research was conducted from February to April 2024 at SMP Muhammadiyah 01 Medan. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and experiential relevance to the curriculum's implementation. A total of 18 participants were involved: one school principal responsible for curriculum policy, four AIK teachers directly engaged in instructional delivery, ten students from Grades VII-IX as primary recipients of the AIK curriculum, and three parents representing external evaluative perspectives. These participant characteristics were considered adequate to provide substantive and contextualised information concerning the implementation of the AIK curriculum.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Eighteen interview sessions lasting 30-45 minutes were conducted using an interview protocol developed around the study's analytical dimensions, including curriculum relevance, instructional strategies, implementation challenges, and the curriculum's influence on students' character development. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Observations were conducted over six weeks during 12 AIK classroom sessions and 4 extracurricular religious activities, focusing on teacher-student interaction patterns, pedagogical strategies, use of learning media and digital tools, and observable indicators of student character. Document analysis included curriculum frameworks, syllabi, lesson plans, assessment reports, student behavioural records, and school activity documentation to support triangulation across data sources.

Data analysis followed the interactive framework proposed by Miles, Huberman & Saldana (Miles et al., 2020), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data reduction, interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents were coded inductively using both initial and pattern coding. Codes such as *value integration*, *teacher readiness*, *student engagement*, *curricular relevance*, and *character outcomes* were consolidated into thematic categories aligned with the study's focus. Data were then displayed through matrices comparing perspectives across teachers, students, and parents, as well as observation tables showing the frequency and consistency of pedagogical practices and character indicators. Conclusion drawing involved iterative cross-checking of themes across data sources, resulting in three major themes: alignment of AIK content with students' developmental needs, variations in instructional implementation, and strengths and limitations in character outcomes.

To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, several validation strategies were employed, including source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and time triangulation. Investigator triangulation was carried out by involving two

external curriculum experts to review the coding categories and preliminary findings. Inter-coder reliability was tested by having an external researcher independently code 20% of the interview transcripts, yielding a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong agreement. Additionally, member checking was conducted by presenting summary findings to participants for confirmation. These procedures collectively ensure that the analytical process was systematic, credible, and scientifically robust.

Results and Discussion

Results

The findings indicate that the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) curriculum is perceived as relevant by teachers due to its emphasis on moral and devotional learning. Teacher 2 stated, *"The curriculum still focuses on akhlaq, ibadah, and Qur'anic understanding, which are essential for students' moral development"* (Teacher 2, Interview, 12 Jun 2025). However, both teachers and students noted that the curriculum pays limited attention to contemporary issues. As Student 7 expressed, *"Sometimes the topics feel too traditional; we rarely discuss problems we face on social media or in daily life"* (Student 7, Interview, 20 Jun 2025). Document analysis supports this view, revealing that only two units include digital ethics, with no explicit coverage of social-media literacy, cyberbullying, or other modern student-centred issues.

Classroom implementation of the AIK curriculum demonstrates varied instructional approaches, although lecture-based delivery remains predominant. Observations recorded nine sessions in which teachers delivered more than 20 minutes of continuous explanation. One entry noted, *"Teacher begins the lesson with a 25-minute lecture; student participation remains minimal except when prompted"* (Observation Sheet 04, 7 Jun 2025). At the same time, seven sessions incorporated discussion strategies, and five involved project-based tasks. Students expressed more positive engagement during collaborative activities; as Student 3 stated, *"I like when we do group projects; it makes learning more fun"* (Interview, 19 Jun 2025). Conversely, Student 9 reported, *"Some lessons feel repetitive, especially when the teacher just explains without asking us questions"* (Interview, 22 Jun 2025).

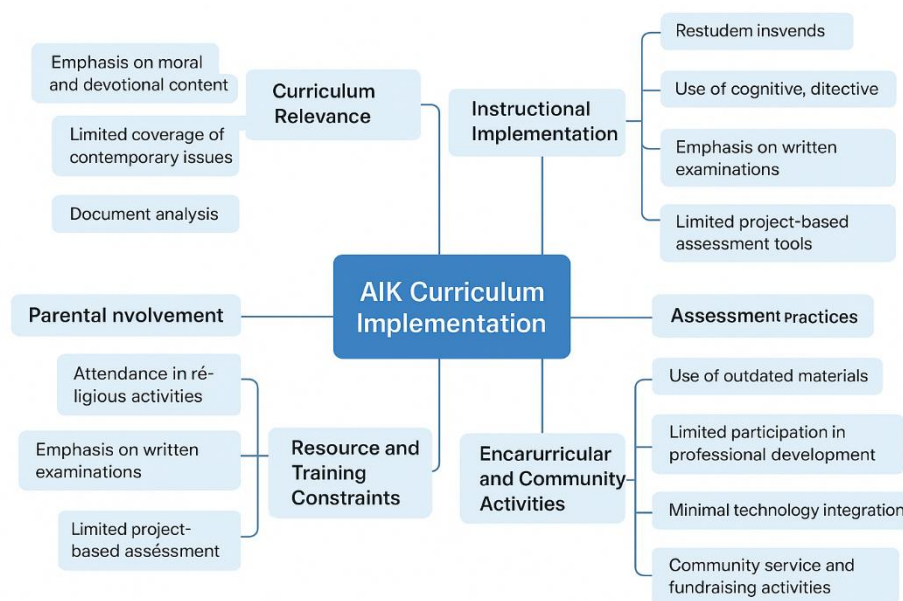
Parental involvement in school activities appears relatively strong, with attendance records showing an average participation rate of 68% in religious programs. Parents also demonstrated enthusiasm for these activities. Parent 1 noted, *"I always attend school meetings, especially for religious events"* (Interview, 25 Jun 2025). Despite this engagement, several parents highlighted communication gaps, particularly regarding feedback on students' character development. As Parent 3 explained, *"We rarely receive detailed feedback about our children's behavior; usually it's*

only when problems arise" (Interview, 25 Jun 2025), indicating limited routine communication between the school and families.

In terms of assessment practices, teachers documented cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects as indicated in lesson plans and assessment rubrics. However, students perceived that assessments continued to emphasize written examinations. Student 1 stated, "Our scores mostly come from exams; we don't often get projects that measure understanding" (Interview, 18 Jun 2025). The collected documents consisted mainly of summative test templates and a few behavioural checklists, with no standardised rubrics for project-based assessments. This suggests that the variety of assessment methods within AIK learning remains limited.

Regarding resources and teacher capacity, the data show that teachers continue to rely on outdated textbooks and additional printed materials. Teacher 4 noted, "We use the same book from a few years ago, and it doesn't match the latest curriculum standards" (Interview, 14 Jun 2025). Limited availability of time also hindered teachers' participation in professional development programs, including those organized by Muhammadiyah. The use of technology in AIK instruction was minimal, with only three out of twelve observed lessons utilising digital media. Teacher 3 acknowledged this constraint, stating, "We want to use more digital platforms, but not all teachers are familiar with them" (Interview, 13 Jun 2025). Meanwhile, extracurricular activities such as community service were implemented and involved 26 students, although no formal mechanism existed to integrate these activities into the official AIK assessment framework.

Figure. 2 Map of AIK Curriculum Implementation And Findings



Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) curriculum is perceived as normatively relevant by teachers, particularly due to its emphasis on akhlaq, ibadah, and Qur'anic understanding. This aligns with classical Islamic educational philosophies, which situate moral refinement (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and character discipline (*ta'dib*) at the core of learning (Al-Attas, 2019). As stated by Teacher 2, "The curriculum still focuses on akhlaq, ibadah, and Qur'anic understanding, which are essential for students' moral development" (Interview, 12 Jun 2025). Nonetheless, students' concerns about the curriculum's limited attention to contemporary issues such as digital behaviour, social media challenges, and modern moral dilemmas indicate a relevancy gap between normative ideals and contextual realities. Student 7 noted that "sometimes the topics feel too traditional; we rarely discuss problems we face on social media" (Interview, 20 Jun 2025). This aligns with modern Islamic curriculum theorists who argue that relevance in Islamic education must include the ability to address socio-technological realities without compromising core values (Halstead, 2004; Hashim, 2014). Thus, the absence of digital ethics, cyberbullying, and social-media literacy represents a form of "curricular misalignment" (Tyler, 2013) that requires strategic revision.

Instructional practices further highlight a tension between curriculum ideals and pedagogical implementation. While some lessons incorporated discussions and project-based activities, the predominance of lecture-based teaching observed in nine sessions suggests reliance on transmissive pedagogy. This pattern resonates with the documented finding that students experienced monotony and disengagement during long lectures. One observation recorded that "Teacher begins the lesson with a 25-minute lecture; student participation remains minimal except when prompted" (Observation Sheet 04, 7 Jun 2025). Constructivist theorists such as Bruner (1996) and Kolb (2014) emphasise that meaningful value internalisation requires active participation, reflection, and experiential learning rather than passive reception. Islamic pedagogical literature also underscores dialogical learning (*muhadatsah*) and experiential practice (*amal*) as vital for cultivating moral behaviour (Al-Attas, 1980; Nasr, 1987). The students' preference for collaborative learning strengthens the argument for pedagogical reform. For instance, Student 3 stated, "I like when we do group projects; it makes learning more fun" (Interview, 19 Jun 2025). These findings suggest that despite the curriculum's moral strength, its transformative potential is weakened by traditional instructional patterns and inconsistent adoption of active-learning strategies.

Parental involvement emerges as another critical dimension shaping the effectiveness of AIK implementation. With an average participation rate of 68% in

religious school programs, the findings indicate that the school benefits from a supportive socio-religious environment. Parent 1 expressed strong engagement: “I always attend school meetings, especially for religious events” (Interview, 25 Jun 2025). However, communication gaps remain evident, particularly regarding the provision of feedback on students’ behavioral development. Parent 3 noted, “We rarely receive detailed feedback about our children’s behavior; usually it’s only when problems arise” (Interview, 25 Jun 2025). Literature on character education emphasizes the necessity of sustained, two-way communication between schools and families to ensure consistent moral guidance (Berkowitz & Bier, 2024; Epstein et al., 2018). In the Islamic context, such coordination is even more urgent because moral upbringing is a shared responsibility between the school and the family (Qiso & Badaruddin, 2022). Therefore, integrating structured communication systems such as behavioural reports, parent conferences, and reflective portfolios is essential to strengthen home-school collaboration.

Assessment practices in AIK learning similarly reveal imbalances between formal policy and classroom realities. Although lesson plans include cognitive, affective, and behavioural indicators, the findings show that written examinations still dominate assessment activities. As Student 1 stated, “Our scores mostly come from exams; we don’t often get projects that measure understanding” (Interview, 18 Jun 2025). The absence of standardised rubrics for project-based assessments further undermines the validity and reliability of non-cognitive evaluations. Contemporary assessment theory emphasises that character formation is best assessed through authentic, performance-based measures such as observations, reflective journals, and portfolios rather than solely through traditional tests (Asrofi et al., 2025; Nuriza & Muniroh, 2025). The limited diversity in AIK assessment methods indicates the need to strengthen holistic evaluation systems to better capture students’ moral development.

Structural factors, including resources, teacher capacity, and technological adoption also shape the fidelity of AIK curriculum implementation. Teachers’ reliance on outdated textbooks and supplementary print materials, as noted by Teacher 4 (“We use the same book from a few years ago, and it doesn’t match the latest curriculum standards,” Interview, 14 Jun 2025), indicates that learning resources fail to reflect current educational demands. Furthermore, limited time for professional development constrains teachers’ ability to adopt innovative pedagogies or integrate digital tools. This finding aligns with implementation research demonstrating that sustained professional development and resource alignment are central to effective curriculum enactment (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Guskey, 2002). Technological integration remains minimal, with only three out of twelve

lessons utilizing digital media, confirming teachers' limited familiarity with digital pedagogy. Teacher 3 acknowledged: "We want to use more digital platforms, but not all teachers are familiar with them" (Interview, 13 Jun 2025). Given the growing importance of digital literacy in Islamic education (Ally & Khan, 2015), improving teacher competence in educational technology is indispensable.

Finally, extracurricular activities such as community service and fundraising programs provide valuable opportunities for experiential moral learning, as they allow students to practice Islamic values in real-life contexts. However, the absence of formal mechanisms linking these activities to the official AIK assessment system limits their pedagogical value. Dewey (1986) argues that experience informs moral development only when it is connected to structured reflection and assessment. For Islamic education, the synergy between faith (*iman*), knowledge (*ilm*), and action (*amal*) is fundamental to character formation (Mohd Aderi Che Noh et al., 2025). Thus, integrating extracurricular activities into formal assessment through structured reflections, rubrics, and portfolios would enhance the coherence of moral learning across formal and informal settings.

In summary, the discussion indicates that the AIK curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 01 Medan is normatively strong but operationally challenged. Issues of curricular relevance, traditional pedagogy, limited assessment diversity, communication gaps with parents, outdated resources, and minimal technology integration collectively impede the curriculum's transformative intent. Addressing these constraints requires systemic improvements across three interconnected domains: (1) curricular contextualization that integrates digital ethics and contemporary moral issues; (2) pedagogical and assessment reform that prioritises student-centred and authentic learning approaches; and (3) strengthened home-school coordination to ensure consistent moral guidance. These reforms align with Fullan (2016) and Okyere's (2025) coherence framework, which emphasises the need for aligned curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and capacity-building to enhance overall educational effectiveness. By implementing these systemic changes, the AIK curriculum can more effectively cultivate students' moral, spiritual, and social competencies in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 01 Medan possesses a strong normative foundation in fostering akhlaq, devotional practice, and Qur'anic understanding. However, its implementation has not fully adapted to the developmental needs of students in the digital era. Limited integration of contemporary themes such as digital ethics, social-media literacy, and modern socio-religious challenges along

with the predominance of lecture-based teaching and exam-oriented assessment, constrains deeper value internalisation. Supporting factors, such as high parental enthusiasm and the presence of Islamic-oriented extracurricular activities, have also not been maximised due to weak communication mechanisms and the absence of formal recognition within the assessment system.

Based on these findings, several strategic recommendations should be prioritised. First, the school needs to conduct curriculum enrichment by incorporating digital ethics, media literacy, and current youth-related issues into AIK learning units. Second, teacher capacity must be strengthened through regular professional development focusing on active pedagogy and technology integration, enabling teachers to implement discussion-based, project-based, and reflective learning approaches. Third, the school should develop a more comprehensive, authentic assessment system, such as character portfolios, reflective journals, and standardised project rubrics, to ensure holistic evaluation of moral development. Fourth, communication between parents and the school must be improved through periodic character-development reports, quarterly conferences, and the use of digital platforms. Implementing these recommendations will enhance the relevance, participatory quality, and overall effectiveness of the AIK curriculum in cultivating contextualised and sustainable Islamic character formation.

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