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Islamic Teachers' Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Senior High Schools: A Systematic Review

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Abstract. In response to the evolving educational landscape in Indonesia, this systematic review explores the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level, with a specific focus on the dynamic interplay between Islamic teachers and the curriculum. The study aims to shed light on the pivotal roles played by Islamic teachers in shaping the educational experience within the framework of increased school autonomy. As these teachers navigate the autonomy granted by the curriculum, they serve as key agents in imparting knowledge and instilling Islamic values in students. The research objectives center on investigating the challenges faced by Islamic teachers, particularly concerning the delicate balance between religious education and a broader curriculum. Simultaneously, the study identifies opportunities for innovative and culturally relevant teaching practices within the Merdeka framework. Employing a comprehensive literature review, the research contributes valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators seeking to enhance the integration of Islamic values in Indonesian senior high schools. In terms of key findings, the study reveals nuanced challenges in balancing religious education with broader curricular goals. However, it also identifies promising opportunities for innovative teaching practices that align with cultural nuances within the Merdeka Curriculum. These findings underscore the significance of navigating school autonomy effectively, especially in the context of Islamic education. In addition, they emphasize the need for tailored approaches to ensure a harmonious integration of Islamic values in the evolving landscape of senior high schools in Indonesia.

Keywords: autonomy; character development; implementation; Islamic teachers; Merdeka Curriculum

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1. Introduction

The educational landscape in Indonesia is rapidly evolving, marked by the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools. This curriculum was introduced by the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013. It aims to enhance the previous curriculum by providing schools with increased autonomy, allowing for a more flexible and locally relevant educational approach (Maipita et al., 2021; Marlina et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to foster a campus culture that is autonomous, not bureaucratic, and an innovative learning system based on the interests and guidance of the industrial world (Maipita et al., 2021). As such, it is crucial to explore the dynamic interplay between Islamic teachers and the Merdeka Curriculum, as the teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience and imparting knowledge and Islamic values to students (Junaidi et al., 2023; Kamila & Agus RM, 2023; Marlina et al., 2023). This research aims to investigate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in integrated Islamic schools and its impact on educational quality. It ultimately aims to contribute valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators seeking to enhance the integration of Islamic values within the ever-evolving landscape of Indonesian senior high schools.

The Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant shift in the education system, aiming to provide schools with increased autonomy and flexibility, while promoting locally relevant educational approaches (Maipita et al., 2021; Marlina et al., 2023). The curriculum is designed to create a campus culture that is autonomous and innovative, based on the interests and guidance of the industrial world, thereby fostering a more dynamic and responsive educational environment (Daga, 2022; Maipita et al., 2021). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in integrated Islamic schools has not only offered new learning experiences to teachers but also demonstrated the potential to unify divisions within the educational system (Marlina et al., 2023; Zendrato & Agatha, 2023). As such, the Merdeka Curriculum presents a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of increased school autonomy, local relevance, and the integration of Islamic values, particularly in the context of senior high schools in Indonesia. Understanding the overarching goals and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum is essential to comprehensively examine its impact on the educational landscape and the specific roles of Islamic teachers within this framework.

The significance of the senior high school level in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and the integration of Islamic values is paramount, as it serves as a critical stage for student preparation to meet diverse educational and societal needs (Davenport Huyer et al., 2020). Senior high schools play a pivotal role in developing quality education. They focus on the overall development of students and their transition into Merdeka citizens, making it an opportune stage to explore the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on student preparation and the fulfillment of diverse educational needs (Arwitaningsih et al., 2023; Iskandar et al., 2023; Kusumawardani et al., 2022). Additionally, research has indicated that high school students, including those in senior high schools, have the capability to engage in rigorous programs and cutting-edge research, highlighting the

importance of understanding how the Merdeka Curriculum can cater to the diverse needs of students at this level (Kusmaryono et al., 2021). Therefore, investigating the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools, particularly in relation to Islamic education, is essential to comprehensively address the unique educational and developmental requirements of students at this critical stage.

Islamic teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools, particularly in imparting knowledge and instilling Islamic values in students (Amin et al., 2022; Asyafah, 2014; Marlina et al., 2023). Research has indicated that Islamic education is regarded as a subject whose function is to develop and instill positive values in students through appropriate instruction (Asyafah, 2014). Therefore, it is essential to explore the dynamic interplay between Islamic teachers and the Merdeka Curriculum, including the challenges they face, such as the delicate balance between religious education and a broader curriculum (Almarisi, 2023; Amin et al., 2022). Additionally, the study of innovative and culturally relevant teaching practices within the Merdeka framework can offer valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators seeking to enhance the integration of Islamic values in the ever-evolving landscape of Indonesian senior high schools (Asyafah, 2014). Understanding the specific roles of Islamic teachers within the Merdeka Curriculum is essential to comprehensively examine its impact on the educational landscape and for the fulfillment of diverse educational needs (Amin et al., 2022; Popp, 2019).

This research faces both challenges and opportunities in exploring the role of Islamic teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools. Challenges include the delicate balance between religious education and a broader curriculum, as well as the need for increased autonomy and flexibility for schools to adapt the curriculum to local needs (Fitra & Tiarina, 2023; Yuhastina et al., 2020). Opportunities arise from the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on innovation and locally relevant teaching practices, which can be harnessed to integrate Islamic values in a culturally relevant manner (High School Moms, 2021). By addressing these challenges and seizing the opportunities, this research aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators in enhancing the integration of Islamic values in the ever-evolving landscape of Indonesian senior high schools.

The research was conducted using a systematic review methodology, employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods to analyze the existing literature on the topic (Dissertation Center, 2024). By addressing the research questions and identifying the central phenomenon being studied, this systematic review will contribute to a better understanding of the role of Islamic teachers in shaping the educational experience and fostering the development of Islamic values in students.

2. Literature Review

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools in Indonesia has presented unique challenges and opportunities for Islamic education. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes educational autonomy and curriculum flexibility, providing schools with increased autonomy and promoting a more flexible and locally relevant educational approach (Ndari et al., 2023; Nuridayanti et al., 2023). However, the delicate balance between religious education and a broader curriculum remains a challenge, as does the need for increased autonomy and flexibility for schools to adapt the curriculum to local needs (Rahayu et al., 2021). Islamic teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience and imparting knowledge and Islamic values to students (Amin et al., 2022; Marlina et al., 2023; Rifa'i et al., 2022). According to research, Islamic education is regarded as a subject whose function is to develop and instill positive values in students through appropriate instruction (Rindayati et al., 2022; Septiani, 2022). Innovative teaching and learning techniques that are enjoyable and culturally relevant are essential for developing such qualities (Wannesia et al., 2022).

The challenges and opportunities presented by the Merdeka Curriculum in integrated Islamic schools require pedagogical innovation and a critical review of the curriculum's implementation to ensure that it meets the diverse educational needs of students (Widiyono et al., 2021; Widiyono & Millati, 2021). Senior high schools play a pivotal role in developing quality education. They focus on the overall development of students and their transition into independent citizens, making it an opportune stage to explore the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on student preparation and the fulfillment of diverse educational needs. Literature reveals that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools has been the subject of several studies, including evaluations of its implementation and challenges. However, there is a need for further research on the integration of the curriculum with local contexts, the role of Islamic pedagogy, and the impact on character development.

By addressing these gaps in the literature, this research aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators in enhancing the integration of Islamic values in the ever-evolving landscape of Indonesian senior high schools.

3. Methodology

The systematic review methodology followed a structured process, detailed as follows:

1. Literature search

Conducting a thorough literature search using the Mendeley database and other relevant sources, a comprehensive exploration identified studies centering on Merdeka Curriculum implementation in integrated Islamic schools, particularly at the senior high school level. Keywords such as "Merdeka Curriculum", "Islamic education", "senior high school", "curriculum integration", and "student preparation" guided the search.

2. Article selection

Two independent researchers scrutinized titles and abstracts, applying the inclusion criteria:

- Studies focusing on Merdeka Curriculum implementation in integrated Islamic schools, particularly at senior high schools.
- Studies addressing challenges and opportunities encountered by Islamic teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.
- Studies exploring the Merdeka Curriculum's impact on student preparation and diverse educational needs.

3. Data extraction

Thorough analysis of selected studies led to extraction of pertinent data, including research design, findings, and conclusions. A standardized data extraction form ensured consistency and reliability in information retrieval.

4. Data synthesis

Applying a systematic literature review method, the synthesis process employed qualitative and quantitative research methods to analyze existing literature (University of Nebraska, 2024). Emphasis was placed on identifying overarching themes, patterns, and key findings, while addressing any discrepancies or contradictions within the literature.

5. Findings and discussion

The results were reported clearly, emphasizing key findings, challenges, and opportunities related to Merdeka Curriculum implementation in integrated Islamic schools, especially at the senior high school level. The discussion involved interpreting results by addressing the research questions and identifying the central phenomenon.

6. Report language

The methodology employed a structured process, replacing speculative terms with reporting language to convey a sense of certainty in the execution of the methodology.

By following this systematic review methodology, we aimed to provide valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and educators in enhancing the integration of Islamic values within the ever-evolving landscape of Indonesian senior high schools (University of Nebraska, 2024).

The PRISMA method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is a comprehensive and transparent guideline for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (see Figure 1). It ensures methodological rigor by guiding researchers through a systematic literature search, selection based on predefined criteria, standardized data extraction, and clear synthesis. This method promotes transparency in reporting, enhancing the reproducibility and reliability of systematic reviews. Its structured approach contributes to the credibility and quality of evidence synthesis in scientific literature. The entire

selection process is visually depicted in Figure 1, illustrating the systematic progression of literature selection.

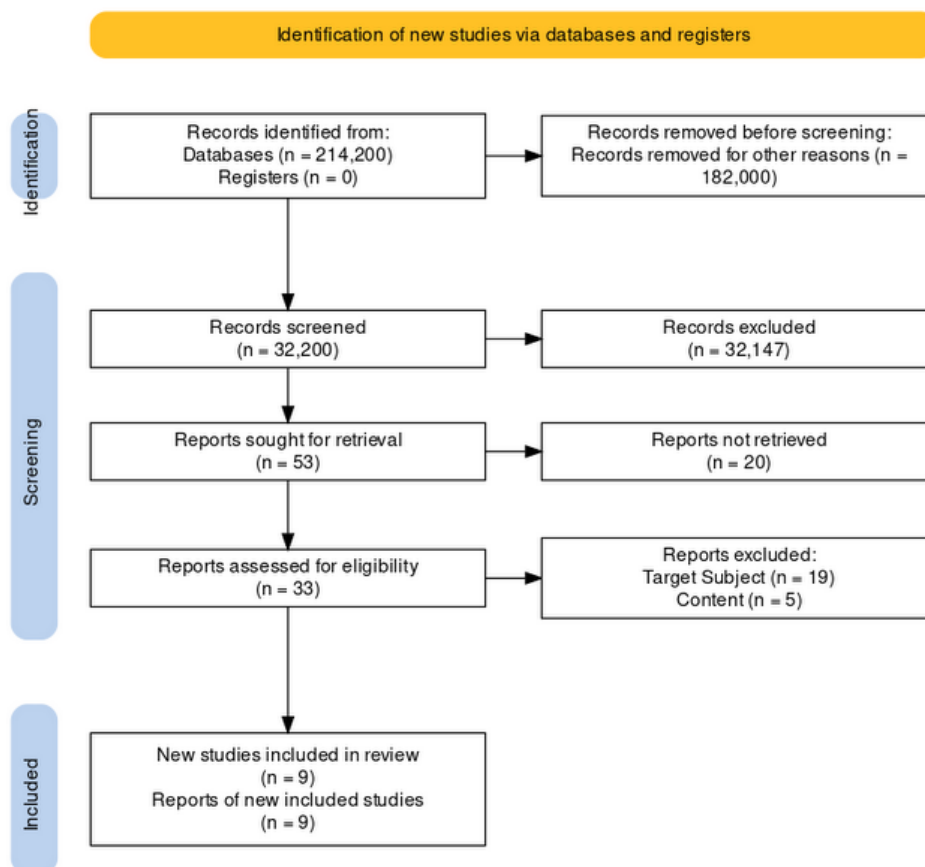


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

The initial phase in the PRISMA literature review process involved the identification of search results utilizing specified keywords, yielding a total of 214,200 articles. The subsequent step involved the screening of articles based on the year of publication, resulting in 32,200 articles. Further refinement was carried out by filtering articles based on their titles, resulting in a selection of 53 articles. Another round of filtering, this time based on the type of article, eliminated 20 non-journal articles, leaving 33 articles for consideration. Subsequently, the journal articles underwent a thorough examination for eligibility, focusing on the target subject and content. Within this scrutiny, 24 articles were deemed irrelevant and excluded. In the final phase, a total of nine articles that met the inclusion criteria were identified.

4. Findings

Table 1 presents a summary of the nine articles that were reviewed. These articles indicate that Islamic religious education teachers applied the Merdeka Curriculum using various methods. Teachers in several schools attended workshops or training to plan Merdeka Curriculum implementation. This has resulted in an enhanced understanding of compiling teaching tools in alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers have successfully developed curriculum operations, learning tools, learning objectives, learning objective flow, and

teaching modules (Kusmaeni et al., 2022). Learning activities result in the creation of teaching modules, which are designed in accordance with the flow of learning objectives derived from predefined learning outcomes (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Table 1: Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools

No.	Source	Senior high school name	Method/s of implementation
1	Zulfi and Khairat (2023)	SMAN 3 Batusangkar	Problem-based learning.
2	Aryanti and Saputra (2023)	SMAN 12 Bandar Lampung	Implementation of intracurricular learning and project implementation of strengthening Pancasila student profiles through project-based learning.
3	Zaini (2023)	SMA 1 Simanjaya	Attending workshop for preparation of learning objective flow and learning modules; constructing a Merdeka Curriculum document; carrying out learning consisting of five elements with a regular approach; performing evaluation based on the aim of learning that has been made.
4	Danial and Widodo (2022)	SMAN 5 Tana Toraja	Using the five differentiated learning indicators: (1) creating an enjoyable learning environment, (2) clearly defined learning objectives, (3) learning in favor of students, (4) effective classroom management, and (5) continuous assessment.
5	Sulastri et al. (2023)	SMAN 9 Malang	Teachers socialized the Merdeka learning curriculum and prepared appropriate materials and devices for learning. Teachers used the project- and problem-based learning methods. The evaluation methods applied by the teachers are diagnostic tests, formative evaluation, and summative evaluation.
6	Siregar et al. (2023)	SMA Ar-Rahman Medan Helvetia	Attending workshops, coaching from supervisors, and teacher meetings. Implementation of online learning is carried out by increasing interactive and communicative learning techniques.
7	Fitria et al. (2023)	SMAN 7 Malang	The teacher gives freedom in choosing learning methods to students, adjusting to the characteristics of students.
8	Dirjo et al. (2023)	SMAS Bina Putra-Kopo	Mapping the learning needs of students, learning planning, implementation, and evaluation are carried out by the teachers individually or with other teachers.
9	Padang and Suhaeb (2023)	SMA Muhammadiyah 4 Surabaya	Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) through project-based learning.

Islamic religious education teachers use project- and problem-based learning methods in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Project-based learning is a learning model that helps students build knowledge through doing projects and developing products. This method trains creativity and requires a scientific attitude in students (Wicaksana & Sanjaya, 2022). The application of the problem-based learning model in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is also necessary because this method involves the activeness of students in problem-solving and studying the relationship between knowledge and these problems. This method is in line with constructivism theory (Syamsidah et al., 2023).

Table 1 shows a clear overview of Islamic teachers' implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, including their incorporation of intracurricular learning. This educational approach enhances students' competencies and allows for a more optimal exploration of concepts (Pratama & Dewi, 2023). Furthermore, a number of educators have executed the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project to cultivate strong character traits in students and encourage endeavors in achieving competencies aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. This profile is designed based on graduation competency standards as outlined by Kholidah et al. (2022).

The table also offers a comprehensive depiction of the diverse methodologies employed by Islamic religious education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum across nine senior high schools. The findings highlight a spectrum of approaches, including teachers attending workshops, incorporating project- and problem-based learning models, and integrating intracurricular activities. Notably, educators have demonstrated a multifaceted understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. This is evident in their development of various teaching tools, such as curriculum operations, learning tools, learning objectives, learning objective flow, and teaching modules (Agustin et al., 2012). This nuanced implementation showcases adaptability and innovation within the educational landscape. The variety in teaching methods and tools across different schools underscores the dynamic nature of curriculum implementation. The cited sources provide a foundation for understanding the specific strategies employed by educators, contributing to the broader discourse on effective educational practices in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

5. Discussion

5.1 Understanding the Merdeka Curriculum in an Academic Context

The utilization of project- and problem-based learning among Islamic religious education teachers aligns with contemporary educational theories, fostering student engagement and active learning. Project-based learning, observed in SMAN 3 Batusangkar, is a pedagogical approach emphasizing students' active involvement in real-world projects to build knowledge, enhancing creativity and knowledge (Wicaksana & Sanjaya, 2022). The application of the problem-based learning model, as evidenced in SMAN 12 Bandar Lampung, resonates with constructivism theory, emphasizing students' active participation in problem-solving processes (Syamsidah et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the implementation of project- and problem-based learning is not only widespread

but also aligned with established educational theories. Islamic teachers' choices reflect an awareness of pedagogical approaches that promote deeper understanding and critical thinking. The cited studies provide a theoretical underpinning for the observed teaching methods, contributing to the ongoing discourse on effective teaching strategies within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Moreover, the incorporation of intracurricular learning and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project underlines the commitment to holistic education. It emphasizes that intracurricular activities are crucial in enhancing students' competencies and optimizing conceptual exploration (Pratama & Dewi, 2023). Projects such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project contribute to character development aligned with graduation competency standards (Kholidah et al., 2022). Thus, these initiatives not only align with theoretical frameworks but also demonstrate a practical integration of educational philosophies within the Merdeka Curriculum. In conclusion, the interpretation of findings highlights the informed and strategic choices made by Islamic teachers in adopting teaching methodologies, underscoring their alignment with established educational theories. The related studies provide a theoretical framework that supports the observed practices, contributing valuable insights to the broader discussion on effective teaching strategies within the Merdeka Curriculum.

5.2 Impact and Insights: Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian Education

The implications drawn from the findings on Merdeka Curriculum implementation in integrated Islamic schools hold significant importance for the educational landscape. The incorporation of intracurricular learning has positively impacted students' competencies, fostering a more optimal exploration of conceptual nuances (Pratama & Dewi, 2023).

Additionally, the execution of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project contributes to character development aligned with graduation competency standards. These implications extend beyond the individual schools assessed, resonating with broader educational discourse. The Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on autonomy and diverse teaching methods aligns with global educational trends that prioritize student-centric learning and creativity (Usanto, 2022). The multi-dimensional approach, incorporating both project- and problem-based learning, speaks to the contemporary need for holistic education that nurtures critical thinking and active engagement.

The findings contribute to the body of knowledge by showcasing the adaptability and effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in various contexts. Policymakers, administrators, and educators can leverage these insights to tailor strategies that enhance the integration of Islamic values and autonomy within the ever-evolving landscape of Indonesian senior high schools. The study thus adds a valuable layer to the ongoing dialogue on educational reform and pedagogical innovation in the Indonesian education system.

5.3 Challenges and Solutions: Navigating Merdeka Curriculum Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in integrated Islamic schools, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations that may affect the generalizability of the findings. To address this, future research could employ observational methods or triangulate data from multiple sources, bolstering the robustness of the findings.

Implementation planning involves systematic workshops or training activities for teachers, guiding the design of teaching modules for organized learning, also including the development of a systematic flow of learning objectives. Six key points from the Merdeka learning curriculum have been internalized into Islamic religious education. First, the project-based learning system involves direct student involvement in problem-solving, enhancing understanding and problem-solving skills. Second, the values of Merdeka learning include freedom for students to choose the time and place of learning, providing an engaging and diverse learning environment. Third, freedom in choosing offered materials allows students to select topics of interest. The fourth point is personalized learning. This involves teachers acting as facilitators, helping students maximize their abilities to discover universal Islamic values. This approach is applied at SMAN 7 Malang and SMAN 5 Tana Toraja, focusing on exploration, elaboration, and confirmation. The fifth point is the application of the link and match principle, connecting Islamic values to students' needs, as demonstrated by SMA 1 Simanjaya (Zaini, 2023). Finally, data interpretation is employed by teachers and students to analyze and solve problems.

Educators actively engaging with Merdeka Curriculum modules experience substantial growth in subject matter expertise, leading to improved instructional practices (Wahyu et al., 2021). The evaluation process for the Merdeka Curriculum involves tests, diagnostics, formative evaluations, and summative evaluations, providing feedback for teachers on their performance (Sulastri et al., 2023). The emphasis on student-centered and interactive learning methodologies prompts teachers to refine pedagogical skills, resulting in deeper engagement and improved performance in assessments. The success of Islamic religious education within the Merdeka Curriculum is influenced by teachers' ability to select essential materials and develop a systematic flow of learning objectives.

6. Conclusion

The study sheds light on pivotal recommendations for the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools, particularly within the domain of Islamic education. First, for stakeholders and practitioners actively involved in Merdeka Curriculum implementation, it is paramount to prioritize continuous professional development for teachers. This can be achieved through tailored workshops and training programs, ensuring educators are well equipped to navigate the complexities of the curriculum. Collaborative platforms should be established to encourage knowledge-sharing among teachers, fostering a culture of continuous learning. Regular curriculum reviews, featuring active participation by educators and subject matter experts, are essential to address emerging challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, allocating resources for

teaching materials and technology is crucial, providing teachers with the necessary tools for effective curriculum implementation. Student engagement and feedback mechanisms should be encouraged to comprehensively assess the curriculum's impact on diverse learners. To ensure accountability and improvement, the establishment of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, incorporating standardized assessments and classroom observations, is recommended.

Additionally, there should be a concerted effort to support inclusive learning environments that cater to diverse needs and abilities. Community involvement and awareness play a pivotal role in reinforcing the core values of the Merdeka Curriculum within the broader societal context. Promoting these values beyond the classroom contributes to a more comprehensive and sustained impact. Looking toward future studies, research and innovation grants should be provided to support projects exploring the efficacy of diverse teaching methodologies within the Merdeka Curriculum. Investigations into the long-term impact of the curriculum on student outcomes and educational achievement are warranted. Conducting a comparative analysis with similar curricular programs can help identify best practices and areas for improvement. Additionally, exploring the dynamic needs of students in depth, focusing on evolving educational trends and societal changes, is crucial for curriculum evolution. Lastly, advocating for regular curriculum updates based on ongoing research findings ensures the continual relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum. These recommendations collectively offer actionable insights for current stakeholders and practitioners, while suggesting valuable avenues for future research endeavors.

7. References

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