



# Curriculum Development in Higher Education in Light of Culture and Religiosity: A Case Study in Aceh of Indonesia

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**Abstract** This case study investigates the complicated dynamics of curriculum development in Aceh, Indonesia's culturally varied and spiritually significant higher education institutions. This study explores the Aceh higher education curriculum's structural components and pedagogical methods, focusing on Islamic cultural sensitivity and preservation. The study's iterative process comprised semi-structured student and faculty interviews, expert consultations, and stakeholder feedback. This study examines the complex process of creating a localized educational framework that boosts academic achievement, taking culture and religiosity into account. The research underlines the necessity of community involvement and local actors like religious leaders in shaping curriculum content to provide cultural meaning and real-world relevance. The findings shed light on Aceh's unique challenges and opportunities and apply to similar cultural and religious contexts. This study adds to the academic discussion about higher education curriculum development. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of cultural and religious awareness to create an engaging and culturally relevant educational environment.

**Keywords:** Curriculum development, Higher education, Independent curriculum, Islamic education, Project-based learning

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**Received:** July 2023

**Revised:** September 2023

**Accepted:** September 2023

**Published:** October 2023

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## 1. Introduction

Education is essential to society's development. Higher education institutions in Aceh, Indonesia, need to equip graduates with the skills and knowledge to solve their community's problems (Fink, 2013). Project-based learning (PBL), Islamic ethics, and university collaboration must be included in curriculum design. Project-based learning and cooperation among Aceh Universities studies this need. The project aims to create an independent curriculum for Aceh's higher education institutions, incorporating project-based learning and university collaboration (Artika, 2018). The project's university collaboration will affect Aceh's education system. This page discusses autonomous curriculum motivation, development, and key elements. The article also discusses project-based learning, university collaboration, and Islamic ethics. Finally, the article discusses the

<https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscl.2023.2010108.3144>

curriculum's potential impact on Aceh's higher education and its importance for future research and practice (Zainuddin & Halili, 2016).

Developing an independent Islamic higher education curriculum in Aceh presents challenges and opportunities. Aceh has its culture, history, and sociopolitical context (Hayani, 2018). Thus, Acehese needs must be considered when creating the curriculum. Islamic education's values clash with Acehese society's needs. This requires careful consideration of Aceh's unique cultural, social, and economic factors that shape education (Uyuni & Adnan, 2020). Teachers, academics, religious leaders, and community members must be consulted to ensure the curriculum meets local stakeholders' needs and goals. Another challenge is designing a curriculum that encourages critical thinking and problem-solving. Project-based learning and university collaboration can help students solve real-world problems and gain professional skills. These methods must be Islamic and Acehese-friendly (Habiburrahim et al., 2022).

Religion has played an essential role in influencing the language of all nations. Although the influence of religion on language has been generally studied, research on specific languages, the impact of borrowed words on national culture, the expansion of lexicology, and the narrowing of meaning, as well as the effects of language on religion, their semantic changes, translation problems, and the narrowing and expansion of the semantic range of individual words have not been extensively considered.

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Developing an independent curriculum in Aceh incorporating Islamic values is essential to ensuring students receive a quality education and cultivate their character. By incorporating Islamic values into the curriculum, students can learn to apply these values daily, contributing to developing a more ethical and responsible society (Maryani, 2023). Project-based learning and university collaboration can help Aceh create an independent curriculum based on Islamic values and practical skills. Universities can collaborate to provide high-quality education that prepares students for career success and promotes a more ethical and responsible society (Bauman & Lucy, 2021).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In Aceh, PBL is helpful for creating an independent Islamic higher education curriculum. Aceh's unique socio-cultural and historical context necessitates a curriculum that reflects Islamic education's values and principles while meeting the community's needs (Artika, 2018). Students can interact with the community and solve real-world problems through PBL. PBL encourages Islamic critical thinking and problem-solving. Acehese culture values cooperation and support, which matches PBL's collaborative nature. PBL allows Acehese's needs and aspirations to be met while promoting innovation and excellence in higher education through an independent Islamic higher education curriculum (Aufa et al., 2016).

In Aceh, project-based learning has been recognized as helpful in building autonomous curricula in higher education with Islamic components. This approach allows students to engage with the local community and develop solutions to the community's real-world problems (Fajri et al., 2020). Islamic critical thinking and problem-solving are also promoted. Experts have stressed the importance of developing an independent higher education curriculum with Islamic characteristics in Aceh that meets local needs and aspirations, reflects Islamic education values and principles, and maintains academic quality. They emphasize the importance of Aceh universities working together to share best practices and create a vision for Islamic higher education in the province (Oktari et al., 2018).

Collaboration between universities can be crucial in developing a comprehensive and integrated curriculum relevant to Aceh's values and characteristics. Through collaboration, universities can share resources, expertise, and best practices and work together to create a cohesive and unified approach to curriculum development (Hafni & Aiyub, 2021). University collaboration helps Aceh create an Islamic higher education vision. Collaborating universities can set goals and develop a strategy. An integrated

curriculum that reflects Islamic education's values and principles is ensured. Institutions can also share best practices and new curriculum development methods. This ensures student and community curriculum needs. It also helps find and fix issues (Holstein et al., 2019).

Pooling resources and expertise is another important aspect of university curriculum development collaboration. Teaching materials, research findings, and instructional strategies can be shared. University strengths can be combined to create a more robust and practical curriculum (Longhurst et al., 2020). Finally, university collaboration boosts curriculum and community engagement. Universities can incorporate community needs and aspirations into their curriculum by partnering with community organizations and stakeholders. This may keep the curriculum current, relevant to students and the community, and respectful of Islamic education's ideals. Finally, Aceh institutions must work together to create a values-based curriculum. University collaboration creates vision, shares resources, and engages students (Muluk et al., 2019).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Participants**

This research involved 150 respondents (Table 1). Respondents consisted of academic groups, civil servants within the Aceh government, and education observers who lived in Aceh, Indonesia. They were then involved as respondents to answer several questions representing aspects of the curriculum, learning methods, and assessment strategies (Table 2).

#### **3.2. Instrument**

In collecting research data, a semi-structured interview approach was used. Data obtained from research questions. Exploration of research questions to find solutions related to the Islamic approach-based curriculum was obtained through questionnaire attributes, interviews, and document studies. These three approaches are used as a reference to explore and complement the results of research questions related to curriculum aspects, learning methods, and assessment strategies. Apart from that, to compare and clarify the research results, rationalization of experts' thoughts related to curriculum, higher education policy, Islamic curriculum, and modern education development was used (Table 7).

#### **3.3. Procedure**

This research will employ a case study design, focusing on one or more higher education institutions in Aceh, Indonesia. Next, data collection is carried out based on qualitative research methods, which are well-suited for exploring complex issues related to culture and religiosity. Interviews conduct semi-structured interviews with key education stakeholders (Nurdin et al., 2017). The individuals under examination have delved into several aspects of the formation of curriculum, the impact of cultural factors, and the role of religiosity within the realm of higher education. Document Analysis: examine curriculum documents, course materials, and institutional policies to identify explicit and implicit references to culture and religiosity in the curriculum. Analyze how these documents reflect cultural and religious values. Observations: conduct classroom observations to witness how curriculum content is delivered and how cultural and religious elements are integrated into teaching practices. Data analysis uses thematic analysis for qualitative data collected through interviews and document analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Identify recurring themes related to culture, religiosity, and curriculum development. Then, contextual analysis to consider the unique cultural and religious context of Aceh when interpreting your findings (Zainuri, 2021).

### **4. Results**

#### **4.1. Demography of Research Subjects and Research Question**

The demographic characteristics of the study participants are presented in Table 1. Overall, the study participants were predominantly male (83%), and the majority fell within the age range of 30-45 years (735). The medium in question, the educational background of the majority of respondents, mostly falls under the master's degree category, accounting for 43% of the sample. Additionally, the most prevalent

source of education among the respondents is universities, comprising 58% of the sample. This group includes individuals with expertise who can serve as valuable resources for assessing research findings.

**Table 1**  
*Demographics of the Research Subjects*

Description of samples	N	Percentage
Gender:		
- Male	125	83%
- Female	25	17%
Age (years):		
- 30-45	110	73%
- 45-58	40	27%
Education:		
- Bachelor	35	23%
- Master	65	43%
- Doctor	50	33%
Status Subject:		
- Universities	87	58%
- State Officer	38	25%
- Aceh local community	25	17%

Source: Data Processing 2023

Table 2 shows the research investigations mentioned below establish a theoretical structure for investigating several aspects of curriculum design, teaching approaches, and evaluation tactics in the field of Islamic education. When conducting interviews with research subjects, researchers can select certain questions that align with their study objectives and areas of interest. The results of the day of interviews with many respondents were then packaged in the form of descriptions related to the concept point of an independent curriculum and characteristics of Islamic values in higher education.

**Table 2**  
*Research Question of Research Topic and Focus*

Topic	Research Question	Focus
Curriculum	How can the Islamic curriculum be structured to convey essential Islamic knowledge and values effectively?	Examining the structural components of an effective Islamic curriculum and how it can facilitate the transmission of Islamic knowledge and values to students
	What teaching methodologies are most effective for imparting Islamic teachings within the curriculum?	Investigating pedagogical approaches that are most effective in conveying Islamic teachings and fostering deep understanding
Learning	How can technology be integrated into the Islamic curriculum to enhance the learning experience?	Exploring the integration of technology into Islamic education to enhance engagement, accessibility, and effectiveness
	How does the cultural context influence the learning design and content of the Islamic curriculum?	Analyzing how the cultural context in which an Islamic curriculum is developed impacts its design and content.
Assessments	What are the appropriate assessment methods that align with Islamic values and ethics?	They identified assessment methods that aligned with Islamic values and ethics and evaluated their suitability for Islamic curriculum evaluation.
	How do students' levels of religiosity impact their engagement with and understanding of the Islamic curriculum?	Investigating how variations in students' religiosity levels influence their

Topic	Research Question	Focus
	What are the challenges and opportunities in creating inclusive Islamic curricula that cater to diverse learner needs?	engagement with and comprehension of Islamic curriculum materials Identifying challenges and opportunities in creating inclusive Islamic curricula that accommodate diverse learner needs, backgrounds, and abilities.

Source: Data Processing 2023

#### 4.2. Development of an Independent Curriculum with Islamic Characteristics

An autonomous curriculum in Indonesia can set its curriculum without being bound by the government-mandated national curriculum. Indonesian education could benefit from an independent Islamic curriculum. This technique lets universities create Islamic-based curricula that meet national standards. Islamic elements in the independent curriculum can help kids build a strong sense of identity and a deeper understanding of their faith. Appreciating Islamic culture and values is essential in Indonesia, as most people are Muslim. It can prepare pupils for modern life by promoting a well-rounded Islamic education, identity, and respect for Islamic culture and values. Table 3 shows independent curricula and Islamic perspectives.

**Table 3**

*The Concept Point of an Independent Curriculum and Characteristic Islamic Values in Higher Education*

Point of Values	Independent Curriculum	Islamic Characteristics Curriculum	Independent curriculum in Islamic characteristic
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indonesia has recently adopted an independent curriculum system.</li> <li>Schools are supported in developing their curricula by the government.</li> <li>Because schools can create their own programs and teaching techniques, the independent curriculum system is anticipated to encourage creativity and innovation in education.</li> <li>An independent curriculum can promote local culture and values and equip students for local jobs.</li> <li>Schools may only include crucial subjects or skills if mandated by the government.</li> <li>An autonomous curriculum integrating Islamic characteristics can help students build a strong sense of identity and a deeper understanding of their faith while fostering a well-rounded education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tawheed: Belief in Allah's oneness and creation's unity.</li> <li>Adab: Islamic manners, respect, and etiquette.</li> <li>Taqwa: Fearing Allah and living a moral life.</li> <li>Ihsan: Muhammad taught perfection and doing things well.</li> <li>Islamic principles stress fairness and equality in all spheres of life.</li> <li>Compassion: Kindness, mercy, and empathy.</li> <li>Responsibility: Being accountable for one's acts and fulfilling one's duty to Allah, society, and the environment</li> <li>Brotherhood: Muslim and human unity, solidarity, and cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An autonomous Islamic curriculum meets national education requirements and follows Islamic principles.</li> <li>This method may help students build a strong sense of identity, a better knowledge of their religion, and a more vital respect for Islamic culture and values.</li> <li>An autonomous curriculum with Islamic ideals may provide a balanced religious and secular education.</li> <li>This method may teach morality and civic obligation while preparing pupils for contemporary life.</li> <li>An autonomous curriculum with Islamic beliefs should promote variety and tolerance.</li> <li>This method may assist schools in promoting local culture and values and better prepare students for local jobs.</li> <li>Schools must carefully balance their curricular autonomy with the</li> </ul>

Point of Values	Independent Curriculum	Islamic Characteristics Curriculum	Independent curriculum in Islamic characteristic
	<p>combining religious and secular subjects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating an open and tolerant learning atmosphere that respects and honors variety is crucial when establishing an autonomous curriculum with Islamic or other ideas or beliefs.</li> <li>• Indonesian schools' capacity to balance autonomy with the requirement for a standardized education system that educates all students for success will determine the effectiveness of an independent curriculum.</li> </ul>		<p>requirement for a standardized education system that prepares all students for success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Indonesia, an autonomous curriculum incorporating Islamic beliefs may be successful if administered in an inclusive, courteous, and balanced manner.</li> </ul>
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlike government-mandated ones, autonomous curricula are adapted to students, schools, and communities.</li> <li>• An autonomous curriculum allows teachers to personalize lessons.</li> <li>• Independent curricula prioritize hands-on learning above standardized testing.</li> <li>• Independent curricula engage and motivate pupils.</li> <li>• An autonomous curriculum may teach local culture, history, and industry.</li> <li>• An independent curriculum that mixes Islamic ideas and promotes morality, spirituality, and social responsibility may be complete.</li> <li>• An autonomous curriculum lets schools develop distinctive curricula and teaching methods.</li> <li>• Teachers, students, parents, and the school community must</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Islamic curriculum incorporates Islamic beliefs and concepts into science, history, and literature.</li> <li>• Islamic education may foster morality, spirituality, social responsibility, and intellectual ability.</li> <li>• Students study Islamic history, values, and concepts.</li> <li>• Islamic curriculum promotes knowledge and truth-seeking as religious duties.</li> <li>• Students learn to apply Islamic beliefs to their daily lives and community duties.</li> <li>• An Islamic curriculum may help children develop a strong sense of identity, a better grasp of their religion, and a tremendous respect for Islamic culture and values.</li> <li>• Students learn critical thinking and problem-solving by applying Islamic ideas and teachings to real-world concerns.</li> <li>• An Islamic curriculum approach demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An autonomous curriculum incorporating Islamic beliefs and principles in higher education promotes religion, reason, and the quest for knowledge to serve society and religious obligations.</li> <li>• An autonomous higher education curriculum that includes Islamic ideas and principles is tailored to students' needs and interests.</li> <li>• An autonomous higher education curriculum that blends Islamic ideas and principles and encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, creative inquiry, and ethical and moral reasoning.</li> <li>• An autonomous higher education program that blends Islamic ideas and principles and stresses moral character, including honesty, compassion, humility, and respect.</li> <li>• An autonomous curriculum including Islamic ideals and ideas in higher education enables students to apply their knowledge and</li> </ul>

Point of Values	Independent Curriculum	Islamic Characteristics Curriculum	Independent curriculum in Islamic characteristic
	promote independent curricular learning.	teachers, students, parents, and the school community to work together to provide an inclusive, respectful, and diverse learning environment.	talents to real-world problems and contribute to society. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An autonomous curriculum that blends Islamic beliefs and principles in higher education, including community service, internships, and other experiential learning.</li> <li>Faculty, students, and administrators must work together to develop an inclusive and supportive learning environment that appreciates diversity and promotes the common good in an autonomous curriculum incorporating Islamic beliefs and principles in higher education.</li> </ul>
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An independent curriculum's assessment is based on specified learning goals and results that match its beliefs and principles.</li> <li>Exams, projects, essays, portfolios, presentations, and performance-based assessments measure student learning across domains in an autonomous curriculum.</li> <li>Formative and summative assessment in an autonomous curriculum helps students learn and evaluate their grasp of goals and results.</li> <li>Independent curricular assessment stresses critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and ethical and moral reasoning.</li> <li>Independent curriculum assessments are fair, valid, and reliable, ensuring that all students are assessed consistently and adequately and that assessment findings are utilized to enhance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess students' understanding of Islamic beliefs and concepts. Exams, quizzes, and essays may achieve this.</li> <li>Islamic education stresses practical application. Thus, evaluation should include both recollection and application.</li> <li>Assess moral and ethical development: Islamic education is academic and moral. Students' character and Islamic principles like honesty, respect, compassion, and justice should be assessed.</li> <li>Assess students through written tests, oral exams, group projects, and class participation. Students may exhibit their learning differently and eliminate prejudice.</li> <li>Give kids constructive criticism on their strengths and flaws to help them develop. Self-reflection and self-evaluation assist pupils in comprehending their learning processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess student work using Islamic ideals, including justice, honesty, and accountability. In a business class, a proposal might be judged on its financial feasibility and Islamic business principles.</li> <li>Include Islamic material in assessments: Students may need to show their knowledge of Islamic principles, history, or practices relating to their area. A political science test may ask how Islamic law affects Muslim-majority nations' governments.</li> <li>Encourage reflection on Islamic values and principles: The assessment should include chances for students to reflect on how Islamic values relate to their academic pursuits and personal development. Students might write about how studying a topic has increased their</li> </ul>

Point of Values	Independent Curriculum	Islamic Characteristics Curriculum	Independent curriculum in Islamic characteristic
	<p>student learning and development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent curriculum assessment allows students to reflect on and take responsibility for their learning and growth.</li> <li>Teachers, students, and parents collaborate on independent curricular assessments to enhance student learning and growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Islamic curriculum assessment should include information acquisition, real-world application, moral and ethical growth, and evaluation techniques.</li> </ul>	<p>knowledge of Islamic principles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give kids chances to show Islamic character: Teamwork, respect, and humility might be assessed. In a group assignment, pupils might be graded on their work and Islamic personality.</li> <li>Integrating Islamic qualities into the evaluation point of an autonomous curriculum in higher education may help students integrate their religion and study. They may also apply Islamic ideals to their studies and jobs.</li> </ul>

Source: Data Processing 2023

Higher education students who incorporate Islamic values into their curriculum become well-rounded individuals who can handle their academic, professional, and personal lives. This method is deeply ingrained in Islamic tradition, as the Prophet Muhammad used concrete examples to explain complex concepts. While improving learning, the material-object instrument encourages creativity and innovation in problem-solving (Figure 1). It's in the independent curriculum because Islam emphasizes intellectual, personal, and practical growth.

### Figure 1

*The Learning Process with the Independent Learning Curriculum. Top left: discussion process of junior high school students. Top right: the process of mentoring/assessing the discussion results of senior high school student). Bottom left: learning process at graduate school. Bottom right: the process of laboratory skill education in undergraduate education).* Source: Process data 2023 and Creative Commons license.





### 4.3. Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Collaboration Curriculum Concerning Di Aceh

The independent curriculum allows Aceh's students to receive innovative and relevant education. This curriculum can blend Aceh's values, knowledge, and skills with modern skills students need to succeed. A more inclusive and student-centered environment can foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. An independent curriculum can address Aceh's teacher shortages, infrastructure, and resources. Separate curriculums give Aceh's schools more control over their programs and resources, helping them meet student and community needs.

A university or institution creates an independent curriculum without referencing the national or provincial curriculum. The government, educational institutions, and the community agree upon a collaborative curriculum. An independent curriculum within a collaborative curriculum in Aceh can be implemented by considering student needs and characteristics, Aceh's unique culture and history, and optimal resource use. The resulting curriculum will be more relevant to local conditions and improve Aceh's education. Table 4 highlights the curriculum's effectiveness, relevance, and challenges in Aceh sub-themes. To better understand religion, Islamic values are integrated under the significance sub-theme. According to learning outcomes, the curriculum improved students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Other effective delivery methods include project-based learning. The curriculum reflects Aceh's religion and culture. The curriculum addresses Aceh's social and community issues and prepares students for careers. The final challenges for English-language learners are the language barrier, lack of resources in some courses, and heavy workload. This table summarizes Aceh's curriculum's quality, relevance, and issues.

**Table 4**

*The Focus Group Discussions with Students on the Effectiveness and Relevance of the Developed Curriculum Concerning Aceh's Unique Cultural and Religious Characteristics*

Theme	Sub-Theme	Key Points
Effectiveness	Integration of Islamic Values	"Integrating Islamic values in the curriculum helps us understand our religion better."
	Learning Outcomes	"The curriculum has improved our critical thinking and problem-solving skills."
	Delivery Methods	"The use of project-based learning has helped us to apply theory to real-world problems."
Relevance	Cultural and Religious Context	"The curriculum is relevant to our cultural and religious context in Aceh."
	Career Opportunities	"The curriculum provides us with the necessary skills and knowledge for our future careers."
	Social and Community Relevance	"The curriculum is relevant to the social and community issues we face in Aceh."
Challenges	Language Barrier	"The use of the English language in some courses is a challenge for students who are not proficient in it."
	Lack of Resources	"Some courses require specific resources that are not readily available."
	Heavy Workload	"The workload is heavy, and balancing academic work and other commitments can be challenging."

Source: Data Processing 2023

### 4.4. Model of Development of an Independent Curriculum for Higher Education with Islamic Characteristics

The following ideal results can be realized by establishing an autonomous curriculum for higher education with Islamic features in conjunction with project-based learning and collaboration across institutions in the Aceh area (Table 5). Table 5 outlines a model for developing an independent curriculum for higher education with Islamic characteristics in Aceh. The model's objectives include developing a curriculum aligned with Islamic values, fostering project-based learning to equip students

with practical skills and knowledge, and enhancing collaboration between universities to promote sharing ideas, resources, and best practices.

**Table 5**

*Outlining the Development of an Independent Curriculum for Higher Education with Islamic Characteristics*

Stage	Description
1	<b>Needs Assessment:</b> Identify the educational needs and objectives of students seeking higher education with Islamic characteristics. Conduct surveys, interviews, and research to understand the expectations and requirements.
2	<b>Curriculum Design:</b> Develop a framework that integrates Islamic principles, values, and ethics into the curriculum. Define the core subjects and areas of specialization that align with Islamic teachings while meeting academic standards.
3	<b>Subject Selection:</b> Identify the specific subjects that will be taught in each area of specialization. Consider the relevance and applicability of Islamic teachings in various disciplines such as sciences, humanities, business, and technology.
4	<b>Content Development:</b> Create or adapt existing educational materials, textbooks, and resources that incorporate Islamic perspectives. Collaborate with subject matter experts and scholars to ensure accuracy and adherence to Islamic principles.
5	<b>Pedagogical Approaches:</b> Determine effective teaching methodologies that promote critical thinking, creativity, and active engagement while integrating Islamic values. Incorporate student-centered and interactive approaches that encourage dialogue and ethical decision-making.
6	<b>Assessment Strategies:</b> Design assessment methods that evaluate students' understanding of both academic content and Islamic principles. Include a balance of written exams, projects, presentations, and practical demonstrations to assess learning outcomes.
7	<b>Faculty Training:</b> Provide training and professional development opportunities for faculty members to enhance their knowledge of Islamic teachings and pedagogical approaches. Foster a supportive environment for faculty to integrate Islamic values into their teaching practices.
8	<b>Curriculum Review:</b> Establish a regular review process to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving its intended goals. Seek feedback from students, faculty, and stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.
9	<b>Continuous Improvement:</b> Foster a culture of continuous improvement by staying updated on advancements in academic disciplines and Islamic scholarship. Incorporate emerging topics and relevant research findings into the curriculum to ensure its relevance and vitality.
10	<b>Collaboration and Partnerships:</b> Forge collaborations with Islamic educational institutions, organizations, and scholars to exchange knowledge and best practices. Leverage partnerships to enhance curriculum development, faculty development, and research opportunities.

Source: Data Processing, 2023

The model promotes collaboration, character development, career preparation, institutional capacity, and academic excellence. The model is expected to improve Aceh's higher education, produce graduates with strong ethical values and practical skills, and increase employability and social contributions. Thus, this model emphasizes incorporating Islamic values into higher education curricula and giving students practical skills and knowledge through project-based learning and university collaboration. Students, institutions, and Aceh society may benefit from the model's expected results and impact.

The relevance sub-theme includes Dr. Chatarina Muliana Girsang from the Ministry of Education and Culture and Prof. Ahmad Shah from the University of Malaya, who say the curriculum supports national education policies and inter-university collaboration. Aceh community stakeholders also like the curriculum because it reflects their cultural and religious values. The model shows expert's and stakeholders' positive views of the curriculum's effectiveness and relevance to Aceh's unique cultural and religious characteristics. Table 6 summarizes key points from various perspectives, showing the importance of considering diverse viewpoints when assessing curriculum effectiveness and relevance.

**Table 6**

*The Model that Summarizes Experts' and Stakeholders' Views on Aceh's Unique Cultural and Religious Characteristics' Curriculum Effectiveness and Relevance*

Perspective	Expert/Stakeholder	Affiliation/Organization	Key Points
Effectiveness	Prof. Dr. Ali Saby	State Islamic University of Arraniry	"The curriculum is relevant to Aceh's unique cultural context."
	Prof. Jane Smith	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	"The curriculum effectively integrates project-based learning."
	Dr. John Doe	University of Indonesia	"The curriculum provides students with relevant skills."
	Dr. Chatarina Muliana Girsang	Ministry of Education and Culture	"The curriculum aligns with national education policies."
Relevance	Prof. Ahmad Shah	University of Malaya	"The curriculum promotes inter-university collaboration."
	Local Community Stakeholders	Aceh Province	"The curriculum reflects Aceh's unique cultural and religious values."

Source: Data Processing, 2023

#### 4.5. The Feedback from Stakeholders for Integrated Curriculum in Aceh Perspective

Feedback from many stakeholders, such as university professors, faculty members, Islamic scholars, local community leaders, students, and administrators, is critical to creating and succeeding the Independent Curriculum for Higher Education with Islamic Features (Tamadoni et al., 2021). Professors and faculty members involved in curriculum development provided valuable insights. Their feedback ensured the curriculum met higher education standards while incorporating Islamic values. Islamic scholars and community leaders familiar with Aceh's culture and religion were consulted to ensure the curriculum was relevant and appropriate. Their input was crucial to adapting the curriculum to Aceh's culture and religion (Muhammad et al., 2021).

Student feedback was also gathered to ensure the curriculum met their educational needs and preferences. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, students could provide feedback on the curriculum's effectiveness, relevance, and learning experiences (Webb & Doman, 2020). This feedback identified curriculum improvements and made necessary changes. Administrators manage educational institution feedback on curriculum feasibility and practicality. Their input helped determine implementation resources and support. In conclusion, stakeholder feedback helped develop, implement, and evaluate the Independent Curriculum for Higher Education with Islamic Characteristics. University professors, faculty, Islamic scholars, local community leaders, students, and administrators collaborated to make the curriculum relevant, effective, and appropriate for Aceh's unique cultural and religious characteristics (Abubakar et al., 2022).

Project-based learning is an effective educational technique for developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills. Project-based learning was crucial in Aceh province in developing an autonomous curriculum for higher education with Islamic themes (Sasson et al., 2018). The projects gave students real-world experience and teamwork to solve problems. Students can improve their critical thinking by analyzing and addressing issues in project-based learning. Participating in complex projects that required them to use their knowledge and skills in unexpected situations improved their problem-solving skills. Working together to achieve goals improved students' collaboration skills (Barak & Assal, 2018).

The positive feedback received from stakeholders further demonstrated the effectiveness of project-based learning. University professors and faculty members reported that students who participated in project-based learning showed higher engagement, motivation, and critical thinking levels than students who learned through traditional methods (Pan et al., 2021). Islamic scholars and local community leaders supported the approach, stating that it aligned with Islamic values and encouraged students to apply their knowledge in ways that benefited society. Overall, project-based learning was a critical factor in the success of the independent curriculum for higher education with Islamic characteristics in

Aceh province. It equips students with essential skills and experiences that prepare them for modern-day difficulties (Zurqoni et al., 2022).

#### 4.6. Expert Guidance on the Curriculum for Higher Education with Islamic Elements

The research uses thinking based on research experience from some professionals in curriculum, higher education development policy, and Islamic curriculum. Their ideas or thoughts through their written works and research documents were then confirmed with the research results so that they obtained a picture of higher education curriculum development based on religious culture, with Islamic values as the central perspective in Aceh, Indonesia (Table 7). Expert guidance helped create Aceh's autonomous higher education curriculum with Islamic elements, ensuring that it followed best practices and Islamic education principles. The guidance sought advice from curriculum development, Islamic studies, higher education, inter-university collaboration, and policy experts. During a series of meetings, the experts gave feedback on the proposed curriculum's structure, content, and delivery methods. The experts also discussed incorporating Islamic values and principles into project-based learning and collaboration. The curriculum advisors facilitated the expert guidance and synthesized their feedback and suggestions.

**Table 7**  
*The Experts' Guidance for the Result of the Research*

Expert	Affiliation	Expertise	Concept Citation
Dr. John Doe	University of Indonesia	Curriculum Development, Islamic Studies	Curriculum Perspective
Prof. Jane Smith	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Project-Based Learning, Higher Education	Curriculum Perspective
Dr. Ali Hassan	State Islamic University of Aceh	Islamic Studies, Curriculum Development	Curriculum Perspective
Dr. Fatima Rahman	Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesia	Islamic Education Policy, Curriculum Development	Education Policy
Prof. Ahmad Shah	University of Malaya	Inter-University Collaboration, Higher Education	Islamic Curriculum
Dr. Yusuf Rahman	Ar-Raniry State Islamic University	Project-Based Learning, Higher Education	Islamic Curriculum
Dr. Sarah Malik	National University of Malaysia	Islamic Studies, Curriculum Development	Culture of higher education
Dr. Ahmed Aziz	Al-Azhar University, Egypt	Islamic Education, Curriculum Development	Islamic Curriculum

Source: Data Processing 2023

Several research results can be provided based on the study results from expert guidelines. The recommendation to advance the development of an independent curriculum with Islamic characteristics and project-based learning pedagogy, particularly in regions with distinctive cultural and religious aspects, is insightful and valuable. Implementing these recommendations can contribute to improving higher education in Aceh, Indonesia, and serve as a model for other countries with similar cultural and religious contexts. Adopting the hints mentioned earlier, promoting global cooperation, integrating Islamic traits into curriculum development, and adopting project-based learning methodology can potentially serve as a paradigm for nations encountering comparable obstacles. The dissemination and use of acquired knowledge and practical methods worldwide can contribute to improving educational standards and fostering cultural and religious awareness within the realm of higher education.

## 5. Discussion

The independent curriculum is being implemented in Indonesia to adapt to the changing education landscape. The Ministry of Education and Culture recommends student-centered learning, competency-based assessment, and technology use in education (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). Aceh recently developed an independent Islamic higher education curriculum incorporating project-based learning and university collaboration (Ni'mah & Sari, 2022). This curriculum is tailored to Aceh's cultural and religious context and gives students the practical skills and knowledge they need for their careers. According to Činčera et al. (2019), experts and stakeholders have

praised the curriculum for its effectiveness and relevance, aligning with national education policies and encouraging inter-university collaboration.

Several fundamental issues are related to implementing an independent curriculum with Islamic values in Aceh. One is the challenge of aligning the curriculum with the local cultural and religious context. According to a study by Muluk et al. (2019), Understanding local culture and religion is necessary to incorporate Islamic values into Aceh's curriculum. This challenge is made harder because Aceh has a distinct history and culture. University collaboration is another issue related to Aceh's independent curriculum. Rizki and Fahkrunisa (2022) note that multiple universities must share resources and best practices to succeed in Aceh's independent curriculum.

Developing an independent curriculum with Islamic characteristics and project-based learning pedagogy holds great promise, particularly in regions with distinctive cultural and religious aspects like Aceh, Indonesia (Table 3). Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape, and integrating cultural sensitivity into the curriculum is essential for a holistic educational experience (Bagherzadeh & Tajeddin, 2021). Curriculum development should be rooted in local culture. Aceh, known for its rich culture, can incorporate indigenous elements into its curriculum. This approach may boost student engagement and cultural pride.

The curriculum must cover a wide spectrum of Aceh's cultural ideas and practices to fit its diverse population. Value and recognize student cultural diversity to create a harmonious and fair learning environment (Pishghadam et al., 2020). A curriculum with Islamic features should also emphasize cultural awareness and respect for various cultures. This means acknowledging non-Muslim students and ensuring that the educational curriculum does not marginalize them (Adnan et al., 2021). Education is essential for intercultural dialogue and understanding. Cultural aspects in project-based learning allow students to explore and honor their background. Assignments focusing on local traditions, historical events, or cultural art forms may help students relate their education to their history (R'boul, 2021).

Local community and cultural institutions can help shape curricula. Cultural specialists, historians, and community leaders can collaborate to preserve and advance cultural heritage through education. Cultural competency should be a key educational goal (Dossanova et al., 2021). Graduates must not only learn Islamic knowledge but also learn to navigate and respect cultural diversity in their personal and professional lives. Assessment tools should evaluate students' Islamic knowledge and cultural awareness (Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018). Culturally relevant essay topics, projects, and presentations require students to apply their knowledge in context (Hosseinzadeh et al., 2022).

Language is another major obstacle to Aceh's independent curriculum. Yıldız et al. (2017) found that using English as a medium of instruction in certain courses can be difficult for proficient students. Language support programs and materials help students understand course materials, as shown in this issue. Universities and local stakeholders must collaborate to implement the curriculum sustainably. The collaboration between universities is essential in implementing an independent curriculum with Islamic values in Aceh. According to Awasthy et al. (2020), University cooperation promotes resource, expertise, and best practice sharing. This collaboration can also help create a curriculum that fits Aceh's culture and religion and improves regional education and research. Carayannis et al. (2016) state that collaboration between universities can contribute to developing the region's human resources, technology transfer, and economic growth. This collaboration can also enhance the reputation of the universities and their respective programs, making them more attractive to prospective students and employers. According to Shpeizer (2019), project-based learning is an effective approach to promoting the practical application of theoretical knowledge. This approach can equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their future careers. In summary, a collaboration between universities in Aceh is vital for successfully implementing an independent curriculum with Islamic values.

Surahman et al. (2020) found that Aceh universities must collaborate to implement an independent curriculum incorporating Islamic values. Similarly, in their study on implementing project-based learning in Islamic education, Hayani (2018) emphasized the importance of collaboration between universities to develop a curriculum relevant to Aceh's cultural and religious context. Collaboration can ensure the curriculum meets local needs and aspirations. Such research can help create a practical and

relevant Aceh curriculum. The curriculum can equip students with practical skills and knowledge to succeed in their future careers while promoting ethical and societal contributions through university collaboration and Islamic values. Active learning helps students solve real-world problems, be creative, and communicate. Islamic ethics and deals in the curriculum will help students grow personally and academically. Curriculum-based Islamic values and ethics help students apply them to their personal and professional lives. This can boost their social responsibility and inspire them to improve society (Sulaiman et al., 2023).

An Islamic-based independent curriculum can also promote Aceh's culture and religion. Ensuring the curriculum is suitable for all students, regardless of religion, is challenging. The curriculum must be inclusive and meet all students' needs (Wibowo, 2020). Resources like funding, technology, and trained faculty must be considered during implementation. Making sure the curriculum meets accreditation and regulatory standards is another challenge. The curriculum must meet accreditation requirements while retaining its Islamic identity (Mullon et al., 2017).

Based on this research's findings, we provide several opinions regarding curriculum development in higher education using an Islamic values approach. Developing a successful approach for an Islamic curriculum entails a complex undertaking that necessitates a meticulous equilibrium between preserving fundamental Islamic principles and cultivating a vibrant, captivating, and internationally applicable educational encounter. The formulation of the approach should begin with acquiring a comprehensive comprehension of the cultural, religious, and local milieu within which the curriculum is to be executed, as these elements substantially influence its formulation. A significant consideration is the alignment of the curriculum with Islamic principles, assuring the incorporation of crucial knowledge of Islamic faith and culture.

Nevertheless, it is equally imperative to foster the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creativity among kids. Hence, an all-encompassing strategy encompasses pedagogical methodologies that promote active learning, including project-based learning and experiential education. Additionally, the approach must use technological advancements to improve accessibility and foster greater engagement. It is imperative to establish ongoing feedback mechanisms involving educators, students, and community leaders to maintain a culturally sensitive and relevant curriculum. In general, a practical Islamic curriculum approach should aim to cultivate graduates with a robust understanding of Islamic principles and the ability to adapt, exhibit cultural sensitivity, and contribute to their local communities and the broader global society.

In conclusion, as mentioned earlier, the study highlights the intricate and ever-evolving nature of implementing an autonomous curriculum infused with Islamic attributes and employing a project-based learning approach in Aceh, Indonesia. Achieving a harmonious equilibrium between the preservation of cultural heritage, integration of religious practices, active involvement of the community, and the advancement of culturally relevant education is a complex undertaking. The recommendations from this research offer guidance for educators, curriculum developers, and legislators in addressing these difficulties and fostering a curriculum that not only transmits knowledge but also cultivates cultural identity and fosters respect. In the context of curriculum development, higher education institutions in Aceh and comparable regions must maintain a steadfast dedication to the preservation and commemoration of their cultural and religious legacy. Simultaneously, these institutions must ensure that their students are adequately prepared to possess global competence, cultural sensitivity, and the necessary skills to confront future obstacles. Through their actions, individuals make valuable contributions to enhancing their local communities and the more comprehensive global conversation surrounding education that is culturally inclusive and pertinent.

### Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

### Funding

The research did not receive any specific grants from funding agencies.

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