

From Formal Curriculum to School Ethos: Implementing AIK/ISMUBA in Muhammadiyah Schools

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Abstract

This article examines how Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK), operationalized in primary and secondary education through the ISMUBA curriculum, is translated from formal prescriptions into classroom pedagogy and school culture. Using qualitative document-based analysis, the study reads the 2017 national ISMUBA curriculum together with purposively selected empirical studies and conceptual works published no later than 2021. The findings show that AIK/ISMUBA provides a coherent institutional identity by combining Islamic knowledge, Muhammadiyah history and ideology, Arabic, worship practice, and character formation. Yet implementation remains uneven. Curriculum design is predominantly subject-centered, teaching is often textbook- and teacher-led, assessment privileges cognitive achievement, and school-level outcomes depend heavily on teacher competence and organizational support. Stronger implementation occurs when formal lessons are reinforced by habituation, exemplary conduct, student participation, contextual problem solving, and a tolerant school ethos. The article proposes an implementation framework linking curricular clarity, pedagogical enactment, school culture, assessment alignment, teacher capacity, and student agency. AIK succeeds not when content is merely delivered, but when values become critically understood, practiced, and institutionally embodied.

Keywords: *AIK; ISMUBA; Muhammadiyah schools; curriculum implementation; Islamic pedagogy.*

INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah's educational identity is inseparable from its effort to combine Islamic formation with modern schooling. Since the early twentieth century, the movement has treated education not simply as the transmission of religious knowledge but as an instrument for forming disciplined Muslims capable of participating in public life. In contemporary primary and secondary schools, this identity is formally expressed through Al-Islam, Kemuhammadiyah, and Arabic, commonly abbreviated as ISMUBA. The term Al-Islam and Kemuhammadiyah (AIK) is often used as a broader institutional label and is especially common in Muhammadiyah higher education, whereas ISMUBA is the more precise designation for the school-level curriculum because it explicitly includes Arabic. The two terms therefore overlap but are not fully interchangeable. This article uses AIK/ISMUBA when discussing the broader educational project and ISMUBA when referring to the formal school curriculum (Majelis Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2017; Arifin, 2015).

The distinction matters because implementation cannot be evaluated by asking only whether schools allocate hours to religious subjects. AIK/ISMUBA is expected to produce a particular relationship among belief, knowledge, conduct, organizational identity, and social responsibility. Its curriculum covers Qur'an and Hadith, faith, ethics, worship and social transactions, Islamic history, Kemuhammadiyah, and Arabic. Official formulations also describe the curriculum as integrative and holistic, linking cognitive

competence with affective and practical formation. In this sense, AIK/ISMUBA is simultaneously a subject cluster, a program of character education, a means of organizational socialization, and a normative framework for school life. The breadth of this mandate creates both its institutional importance and its implementation difficulty. A formal curriculum can specify outcomes, content, processes, teacher standards, and assessment, but it cannot by itself determine what occurs in classrooms. Curriculum implementation is mediated by how teachers interpret policy, by the instructional resources available to them, by school leadership, by student backgrounds, and by the routines through which values are enacted or contradicted. Educational policy is therefore not simply implemented; it is interpreted and reconstructed in practice (Spillane et al., 2002; Ball et al., 2012).

This insight is particularly relevant to Muhammadiyah schools because they operate within a large and decentralized network. Schools share a national organizational identity, but they differ in financial capacity, teacher supply, local religious culture, student composition, and institutional leadership.

Studies published before and through 2021 reveal a recurrent gap between the normative ambition of AIK/ISMUBA and its pedagogical enactment. At the formal level, the 2017 curriculum articulates standards for graduate competence, content, process, teachers, and assessment. At the school level, researchers report substantial efforts to integrate national, Ministry of Religious Affairs, and Muhammadiyah requirements, to build Islamic character, and to embed religious practices in daily routines (Widayanti, 2019; Handayani et al., 2020; Mufti & Widodo, 2021). Yet the same studies identify subject-centered design, limited learning media, teacher-dominated methods, unstable allocation of time, and assessment practices that privilege knowledge over attitudes and skills (Pratama & Widodo, 2019; Yuniarti et al., 2020). These are not minor technical defects. They affect whether AIK becomes reflective moral education or remains a set of examinable propositions and institutional symbols.

The problem is often obscured by two opposite assumptions. The first assumes that the existence of a centrally issued curriculum guarantees ideological and pedagogical coherence across the Muhammadiyah school system. The second assumes that religious formation is too intangible to be assessed beyond general claims about character. Both assumptions are weak. Central standards can reduce fragmentation, but only if schools possess the capacity to translate them into meaningful teaching. Conversely, moral and religious formation cannot be reduced to test scores, but its implementation can still be examined through observable alignment among goals, learning activities, school routines, assessment, and student participation. The relevant question is not whether a school can prove inner piety, but whether its institutional practices create credible conditions for understanding, practicing, questioning, and embodying the values it officially teaches.

This article examines the implementation of AIK/ISMUBA in Muhammadiyah schools through a qualitative analysis of official curriculum documents and purposively selected studies published no later than 2021. It asks three questions. First, how is AIK/ISMUBA constructed as a formal curriculum and institutional identity? Second, what recurring patterns and problems appear in its pedagogical implementation? Third, what framework

can connect curriculum, pedagogy, school culture, assessment, teacher capacity, and student agency more coherently? The central argument is that AIK/ISMUBA becomes educationally effective only when it moves beyond subject delivery and functions as a coherent school ethos. Such coherence requires neither the dissolution of subject knowledge nor the substitution of ritual routines for teaching. It requires the alignment of explicit knowledge, reflective pedagogy, embodied practice, organizational example, and contextual moral action.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative document-based curriculum analysis. It is not a systematic literature review and does not claim exhaustive retrieval or statistical synthesis of all research on AIK/ISMUBA. The design is closer to a historically bounded, interpretive case synthesis: official prescriptions are read alongside empirical studies of implementation in selected Muhammadiyah schools. The unit of analysis is not an individual school but the relationship between the formal AIK/ISMUBA architecture and the recurrent mechanisms through which it is enacted. This design is appropriate because the research problem concerns institutional meaning and implementation patterns rather than the estimation of an average causal effect.

The evidence cutoff is 31 December 2021. This limit is deliberate and follows the requirement that the newest references used in the article be from 2021. The temporal boundary also has analytical value. It captures implementation of the 2017 ISMUBA curriculum during its early institutionalization, including studies conducted before and during the first years of pandemic-related educational disruption, without importing later revisions or post-2021 policy developments. Claims in this article should therefore be read as an assessment of the curriculum and implementation evidence available through 2021, not as a description of every subsequent reform.

The core corpus consists of the 2017 ISMUBA curriculum issued by the Council for Primary and Secondary Education of Muhammadiyah's Central Board and fourteen Muhammadiyah-specific publications from 2015 to 2021. These include studies of curriculum design, implementation, evaluation, character education, tolerance, digital literacy, and school quality at primary, junior secondary, senior secondary, and vocational levels. A small number of AIK studies in Muhammadiyah higher education were used only where they clarified the broader philosophy of value education or curriculum management. General works on curriculum implementation, assessment, hidden curriculum, Islamic pedagogy, and educational purpose supplied analytical concepts rather than evidence about particular Muhammadiyah schools.

Documents were selected purposively according to four criteria. First, they had to address AIK, ISMUBA, or the distinctive religious curriculum of Muhammadiyah educational institutions. Second, school-based studies were prioritized over general commentaries. Third, the corpus had to provide evidence about at least one implementation dimension: curriculum design, instructional practice, assessment, school culture, teacher capacity, or student formation. Fourth, no publication after 2021 was included. The objective was analytical saturation around implementation mechanisms, not bibliometric

completeness. The method therefore avoids PRISMA terminology, database coverage claims, and numerical statements about the total universe of studies.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the formal curriculum was coded for its stated aims, knowledge domains, competency structure, process standards, teacher expectations, and assessment principles. Second, empirical studies were read for evidence of enactment, adaptation, constraints, and reported outcomes. Third, the resulting codes were compared across levels of schooling and organized into six dimensions: curricular clarity, pedagogical enactment, school culture, assessment alignment, teacher and organizational capacity, and student agency and contextual relevance. These dimensions were informed by policy-enactment theory, constructive alignment, formative assessment, and the distinction among qualification, socialization, and subjectification in educational purpose (Biggs, 1996; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Biesta, 2009; Ball et al., 2012).

The interpretation follows two safeguards. Normative claims in official documents are not treated as empirical proof that outcomes occurred, while positive findings in local case studies are not generalized mechanically to the entire Muhammadiyah school network. In addition, recurring weaknesses are interpreted as implementation conditions rather than as evidence that AIK/ISMUBA is inherently ineffective. The analysis asks what combination of curriculum, pedagogy, institutional culture, and capacity makes its stated aims more or less plausible. This approach produces a framework for diagnosis and development, not a national ranking of schools.

Three limitations remain. The selected studies vary in methodological depth, and many rely on interviews, observations, and descriptive judgments without longitudinal outcome measures. The geographic distribution is uneven, with a concentration in Java and selected urban or semi-urban schools. Finally, the literature frequently uses broad terms such as character, religiosity, or morality without stable operational definitions. These limits make strong causal claims impossible. They also reinforce the need to distinguish evidence of implementation from evidence of durable student transformation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. AIK/ISMUBA as a national curriculum and institutional identity

The 2017 ISMUBA curriculum represents an important step in the rationalization of Muhammadiyah's educational identity. Rather than leaving religious instruction to local custom, it defines a common architecture for primary and secondary schools. The document sets out foundations, graduate competency standards, content standards, process standards, teacher standards, assessment standards, and syllabi. It also situates ISMUBA within the historical narrative of Ahmad Dahlan's educational reform, presenting Muhammadiyah schooling as an integrative response to the separation between traditional religious education and secular colonial schooling (Majelis Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2017). The curriculum therefore does more than list topics. It establishes a national institutional language through which schools can identify themselves as Muhammadiyah schools.

This institutional language has three layers. The first is Islamic literacy: students are expected to understand foundational beliefs, texts, worship, ethics, and Islamic history. The second is movement literacy: Kemuhammadiyahan introduces the organization's history, principles, reformist orientation, and social mission. The third is practical formation: knowledge is expected to shape worship, conduct, social responsibility, and participation in the school community. Arabic supports access to religious texts and forms part of the distinctive curriculum package. Together, these layers combine religious qualification, organizational socialization, and moral practice. This combination explains why AIK/ISMUBA cannot be evaluated as an ordinary content subject.

The curriculum also solves a governance problem. A network of schools spread across diverse regions requires enough standardization to preserve identity but enough flexibility to work within different state regulations and local conditions. Empirical studies show schools combining the national curriculum, Ministry of Religious Affairs provisions where relevant, and Muhammadiyah's ISMUBA requirements (Widayanti, 2019; Mufti & Widodo, 2021). This layered arrangement can be productive because it prevents religious identity from being detached from national educational standards. However, it also increases curriculum density and coordination demands. Teachers and school leaders must manage overlapping content, schedules, reporting systems, and assessment expectations.

The institutional strength of ISMUBA is thus also a source of implementation risk. When a distinctive curriculum becomes a primary marker of organizational identity, compliance can be mistaken for formation. Schools may demonstrate that subjects appear on the timetable, textbooks are used, religious routines are scheduled, and examination results are recorded, while the deeper relation among understanding, practice, reflection, and social action remains weak. A formal curriculum can secure visibility and continuity; it cannot guarantee that students experience its elements as an integrated moral world.

The reviewed evidence suggests that schools differ in how they resolve this tension. Some treat ISMUBA primarily as a cluster of subjects. Others attempt to connect it to school culture, extracurricular activities, worship routines, and community engagement. The difference is analytically significant. Subject provision answers the question of what is taught. Institutional integration answers the question of how the school's organization, relationships, and daily practices reinforce or undermine what is taught.

Table 1. Recurring implementation patterns in AIK/ISMUBA studies published through 2021

Dimension	Formal intention	Recurring evidence	Implementation risk
Curriculum architecture	Integrate Islamic knowledge, Muhammadiyah identity, Arabic, character, and practice.	National standards provide coherence, but local schools combine multiple regulatory curricula.	Curriculum overload and compliance-oriented implementation.
Pedagogy	Use active, contextual, integrative, and learner-relevant processes.	Case studies report a continued tendency toward subject-centered and teacher-led instruction.	Memorization without reflective understanding or moral reasoning.

Dimension	Formal intention	Recurring evidence	Implementation risk
School culture	Reinforce lessons through worship, habituation, exemplary conduct, and social routines.	Religious routines and teacher example often carry substantial formative weight.	Ritual compliance, inconsistency among staff, or coercive discipline.
Assessment	Evaluate knowledge, attitudes, and skills in an integrated manner.	Cognitive tests are generally easier to administer than valid assessment of conduct and practice.	Inflated character claims and weak feedback for improvement.
Teacher capacity	Employ teachers with religious knowledge, pedagogical competence, and Muhammadiyah literacy.	Outcomes depend heavily on teacher interpretation, learning media, and leadership support.	Uneven quality and dependence on individual commitment.
Contextual relevance	Connect Islamic values to social problems, pluralism, technology, and students' lives.	Some studies document tolerance, minority-context adaptation, and digital-literacy initiatives.	Ideological content detached from contemporary ethical problems.

2. The tension between subject-centered design and holistic aspiration

A central finding is the coexistence of holistic language and subject-centered design. The 2017 curriculum seeks integration among knowledge, attitudes, and skills, yet its operational structure divides content into identifiable subjects and competency sequences. This division is understandable. Subjects make curriculum manageable, support teacher specialization, and allow standardization across a large network. The problem arises when the administrative form of the curriculum becomes the pedagogical logic of implementation. Mufti and Widodo (2021), examining an elementary school, found that ISMUBA tended toward subject-centered design and argued for stronger learner-centered and problem-centered development; related school-level research also emphasized relevance, flexibility, continuity, efficiency, and effectiveness in local curriculum adaptation (Iswanto & Widodo, 2020). Their conclusion identifies a structural tension rather than a local anomaly.

Subject-centered organization is not intrinsically defective. Students need systematic access to Qur'anic studies, doctrine, worship, history, organizational knowledge, and Arabic. Without disciplinary structure, integration can become superficial. However, a curriculum intended to form moral judgment cannot rely only on sequential coverage of content. Students must connect doctrinal concepts to situations, interpret competing claims, examine consequences, and articulate reasons for action. Halstead (2004) notes that Islamic education involves both the transmission of a moral tradition and the formation of dispositions. Sahin (2013) further argues that Islamic pedagogy must move beyond authoritarian transmission toward reflective and dialogical learning. The challenge is therefore to preserve structured knowledge while preventing it from becoming inert.

Empirical studies illustrate the consequences of weak integration. In some schools, the curriculum is implemented through lesson planning, textbook use, regular instruction, and religious activities, but teaching methods and learning media remain limited (Pratama & Widodo, 2019; Yuniarti et al., 2020). When teachers face dense content and limited time, lecture and recitation are rational short-term responses. They permit syllabus coverage and classroom control. Yet they can reduce students to recipients of correct answers, a pattern close to what Freire (1970) criticized as banking education. In AIK/ISMUBA, this risk is intensified because correct religious language may be mistaken for internalized commitment.

A holistic curriculum requires horizontal and vertical integration. Horizontal integration connects ISMUBA with science, social studies, language, arts, and contemporary issues within the same grade. Vertical integration builds increasingly complex understanding across grades instead of repeating moral slogans. The reviewed documents provide a basis for both, but local implementation often depends on teacher initiative rather than stable school design. Integration is therefore vulnerable to staff turnover, scheduling pressures, and the assumption that religious teachers alone are responsible for the school's Islamic identity.

The strongest studies point toward transformation of both content and process. Aly (2019) argues that developing quality Muhammadiyah schools requires transformation in curriculum content and learning processes, not merely the addition of hours or materials. A holistic-integrative pilot evaluated by Hikmah et al. (2020) similarly treats context, inputs, processes, and products as connected. These approaches imply that curriculum improvement must involve leadership, teacher development, classroom interaction, assessment, and institutional routines. Holism is not achieved by labeling a curriculum holistic. It is achieved when separate components produce mutually reinforcing educational experiences.

3. Pedagogical enactment: from transmission to reflective participation

The second recurring pattern concerns pedagogy. AIK/ISMUBA teachers carry a demanding professional role. They are expected to possess religious knowledge, understand Muhammadiyah's reformist positions, model conduct, manage classroom learning, assess multiple domains, and relate inherited teachings to contemporary life. The 2017 curriculum recognizes teacher standards, but empirical implementation still depends on how teachers interpret both content and students. Spillane et al. (2002) show that policy implementation is shaped by implementers' prior knowledge, beliefs, and situational cues. In AIK/ISMUBA, a teacher who interprets fidelity as repeating textbook formulations will enact a different curriculum from a teacher who interprets fidelity as helping students reason within Muhammadiyah's ethical tradition.

Teacher-led exposition remains necessary for some material, especially where students require conceptual foundations or accurate guidance in worship. The problem is monotony and exclusivity. When exposition dominates every topic, students receive few opportunities to practice interpretation, deliberation, or moral decision-making. Active pedagogy does not mean replacing religious authority with unrestricted opinion. It means designing tasks in which students use authoritative sources, relevant knowledge, and reasoned argument to address questions. Case discussion, project work, inquiry, structured debate, peer teaching, reflective

journals, and community-based assignments can complement direct instruction while maintaining curricular boundaries.

The reviewed school studies suggest that methodological innovation improves engagement but is not yet institutionally secure. Yuniarti et al. (2020) used classroom action research to address weaknesses in methods and learning processes and reported changes across knowledge, attitudes, and skills. The study's short duration prevents broad conclusions, but it demonstrates that outcomes are sensitive to instructional design. Saputra et al. (2019) call for integrating digital literacy into AIK learning so that students can engage critically with the information environment of the fourth industrial era. These arguments remain relevant because students increasingly encounter religious claims through networked media rather than only through teachers and textbooks.

Pedagogical quality also depends on whether students are treated as moral agents. Biesta's (2009) distinction among qualification, socialization, and subjectification is useful here. AIK/ISMUBA qualifies students through religious knowledge and practical competence; it socializes them into Muhammadiyah's tradition and communal expectations; and it should also support subjectification by enabling them to act responsibly rather than merely conform. If the third function is absent, students may reproduce institutional vocabulary without developing the judgment needed to apply values in unfamiliar situations.

This point is especially important for Kemuhammadiyah. Organizational history can be taught as names, dates, congress decisions, and doctrinal formulations. Such knowledge preserves collective memory, but it can also become ceremonial. A reformist movement should teach its history as a history of problem solving: why Ahmad Dahlan challenged educational dichotomies, why al-Ma'un generated social institutions, how tarjih addresses disagreement, and how organizational decisions respond to changing conditions. This approach converts movement history from identity memorization into methodological inheritance. Students learn not only what Muhammadiyah concluded but how reformist reasoning connects text, knowledge, and social need.

Reflective participation also requires space for questions. Religious classrooms sometimes treat uncertainty as weakness or dissent. Yet students already face plural interpretations, scientific claims, social-media controversies, and ethical dilemmas. Suppressing questions does not eliminate them; it relocates them to less accountable spaces. A pedagogically confident AIK classroom should distinguish disrespect from inquiry and doctrinal relativism from disciplined reasoning. The goal is not to make every position equally valid, but to demonstrate how claims are evaluated and why Muhammadiyah adopts particular positions. Such transparency strengthens rather than weakens institutional identity.

4. School culture, habituation, and the hidden curriculum

Formal lessons are only one part of AIK/ISMUBA implementation. School routines communicate expectations about time, cleanliness, worship, interpersonal conduct, dress, service, authority, and responsibility. Studies of character formation in Muhammadiyah schools repeatedly emphasize habituation, exemplary behavior, and religious activities alongside classroom

instruction (Baidarus et al., 2020; Handayani et al., 2020; Mulyanto, 2020). These practices constitute a hidden or implicit curriculum: students learn not only from what teachers state but from how the institution actually distributes respect, responds to mistakes, handles difference, and treats weaker members (Jackson, 1968).

Habituation has real pedagogical value. Repeated practice can stabilize conduct, reduce the distance between knowledge and action, and create a shared rhythm of school life. Congregational prayer, Qur'an reading, charitable activity, cleanliness, and service can make religious commitments tangible. However, repetition alone does not guarantee moral formation. Students may comply because of surveillance, peer pressure, or fear of sanctions. The educational task is to connect routine to meaning, allow age-appropriate reflection, and gradually transfer responsibility from external control to self-regulation.

Exemplary conduct is equally decisive. A school cannot credibly teach honesty while tolerating manipulation of grades, teach justice while applying discipline selectively, or teach service while treating employees instrumentally. The moral authority of AIK/ISMUBA depends on institutional congruence. This includes the conduct of principals, classroom teachers, administrative staff, and organizational boards, not only ISMUBA teachers. Where adults embody mutual respect, intellectual openness, disciplined worship, and social concern, school culture amplifies the formal curriculum. Where institutional practice contradicts official values, students receive a stronger lesson in hypocrisy than any textbook can repair.

The hidden curriculum also includes patterns of voice and power. If students are always passive, they learn that religious authority is unaccountable. If girls and boys encounter unequal intellectual expectations without justification, they learn a gendered hierarchy beyond the explicit curriculum. If non-Muhammadiyah students or local cultural practices are treated with automatic suspicion, students learn boundary maintenance rather than confident plural coexistence. The implementation of AIK/ISMUBA must therefore be assessed not only through visible rituals but through relationships, participation, fairness, and the treatment of difference.

5. Assessment alignment and the problem of evidencing character

Assessment is the clearest point at which holistic aims become difficult to operationalize. Knowledge can be tested through written and oral tasks. Worship skills can be observed against defined procedures. Attitudes and character, however, are contextual, developmental, and vulnerable to impressionistic judgment. Pratama and Widodo (2019) reported that evaluation remained more focused on knowledge while attitudes and skills received less attention. This imbalance is unsurprising because cognitive assessment is administratively efficient, but it creates a serious alignment problem. When examinations reward recall, students and teachers rationally prioritize recall even if curriculum documents emphasize integrated formation.

Constructive alignment requires correspondence among intended outcomes, learning activities, and assessment (Biggs, 1996). If an outcome concerns ethical reasoning, students need opportunities to analyze cases and justify decisions. If it concerns social responsibility, assessment should include participation in meaningful projects and reflection on consequences. If it concerns worship competence, observation should focus on both procedural understanding

and increasing independence. No single instrument can validly represent all these dimensions. A balanced system needs written assessment, performance tasks, observation, portfolios, student reflection, and structured feedback.

Assessment of character also raises ethical risks. Teachers can easily convert personal impressions into permanent labels, reward outward conformity, or penalize students who are quiet, critical, culturally different, or still developing. Lickona (1991) emphasizes moral knowing, feeling, and action, but these domains should not be translated into simplistic personality scores. Schools need clear behavioral indicators tied to specific contexts, multiple observations over time, and opportunities for students to respond and improve. Assessment should serve formation rather than surveillance.

Formative assessment is especially important. Black and Wiliam (1998) show that assessment supports learning when evidence is used to adapt teaching and when students understand goals and next steps. In AIK/ISMUBA, feedback can help students correct misconceptions, improve practice, examine motives, and recognize inconsistencies between stated values and conduct. A score without feedback merely ranks performance. Reflective conferences, peer feedback, learning journals, and project debriefs can make moral and religious learning more explicit without claiming access to a student's inner faith.

At the institutional level, outcome claims must remain proportionate to evidence. A school can document curriculum implementation, participation, observed practices, disciplinary patterns, student reasoning, and community projects. It cannot infer durable piety solely from attendance at rituals or high test scores. The distinction between implementation evidence and transformation evidence is essential for credible evaluation. Overclaiming success weakens the very ethic of honesty that AIK/ISMUBA seeks to cultivate.

6. Teacher capacity, tolerance, and contextual relevance

The literature consistently implies that teacher capacity is the principal mediator between curriculum design and student experience. Capacity includes subject knowledge, pedagogy, assessment literacy, Muhammadiyah literacy, digital competence, and the ability to work collaboratively across subjects; Islamic teacher education literature likewise stresses the need to connect professional preparation with the distinctive purposes of Islamic schooling (Memon, 2011). Fullan (2007) argues that educational change depends on capacity building and shared meaning, not simply policy adoption. Schools that distribute curriculum books without sustained professional learning are likely to produce surface compliance. Teachers need opportunities to study the curriculum, observe practice, design common tasks, analyze student work, and revise teaching collectively.

Organizational support matters because individual commitment cannot compensate indefinitely for weak systems. School leaders determine scheduling, workload, professional development, coordination, and the status of ISMUBA within the broader curriculum. They also decide whether AIK is treated as the exclusive responsibility of religious teachers or as a school-wide formation project. Where general-subject teachers understand the institution's educational aims,

integration becomes possible. Where AIK is isolated, students encounter a divided curriculum: religious values in designated lessons and unrelated performance pressures elsewhere.

Contextual relevance is the final recurring dimension. Tamrin (2020) examines the internalization of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin in a Muhammadiyah senior high school in a minority context, showing that AIK/ISMUBA must engage local social relations rather than operate only as internal identity reproduction. Bustam et al. (2021) analyze ISMUBA as an effort to prevent intolerance among Muhammadiyah high-school students. These studies indicate that organizational identity and openness are not opposites. A confident Muhammadiyah curriculum can teach its own positions while cultivating fairness, nonviolence, dialogue, and civic coexistence.

Digital literacy represents another contextual demand. By 2019, scholars were already arguing that AIK learning should prepare students to evaluate digital information, collaborate, and use technology responsibly (Saputra et al., 2019). This is not an optional modernization theme. Religious authority, misinformation, sectarian provocation, consumer culture, and identity performance increasingly operate through digital media. AIK/ISMUBA should therefore teach verification, source evaluation, communicative ethics, privacy, and responsibility for the consequences of sharing content. Such competencies extend the classical concern with truthfulness and harm into students' actual information environment.

Contextualization must nevertheless avoid trend-driven dilution. Attaching contemporary topics to lessons without adequate theological and conceptual depth produces superficial relevance. The more defensible approach begins with clear normative resources and asks students to use them in analyzing concrete problems. This preserves continuity with Muhammadiyah's tradition while making *tajdid* pedagogically visible. Reform is learned not as a slogan but as a disciplined practice of connecting revelation, knowledge, and changing social conditions.

Discussion

1. AIK/ISMUBA implementation as pedagogical coherence

The findings show that the central challenge is not the absence of curriculum but the production of coherence. Muhammadiyah has already established a distinctive national architecture. The unresolved issue is whether its components work together at school level. A coherent implementation aligns what the curriculum says, what teachers teach, what students do, what the school rewards, and what adults model. Incoherence occurs when one component contradicts another: active citizenship is taught through passive classrooms, honesty is assessed through easily manipulated tasks, tolerance is stated while difference is stigmatized, or social responsibility is celebrated without meaningful service.

This interpretation reframes fidelity. Fidelity should not mean literal replication of every classroom activity across thousands of schools. Such uniformity is neither realistic nor desirable. It should mean fidelity to the curriculum's educational purposes, knowledge commitments, and ethical principles, combined with responsible adaptation to learners and local contexts. Ball et al. (2012) describe schools as sites where policy is enacted rather than merely executed. For Muhammadiyah, this means local adaptation must be neither arbitrary nor purely managerial. It

should be explainable in relation to the movement's educational philosophy and the needs of students.

The evidence also challenges a narrow understanding of integration. Integration is often discussed as combining religious and general subjects. That is necessary but insufficient. AIK/ISMUBA requires at least four forms of integration: epistemic integration among revelation, reason, and experience; curricular integration across subjects and grade levels; pedagogical integration among knowledge, practice, and reflection; and institutional integration between official values and organizational conduct. A school may display integrated timetables while remaining fragmented in the other three senses.

The distinction between formation and indoctrination is equally important. Every school socializes students into values, but religious education becomes educationally weak when it discourages understanding or substitutes authority for reasoning in every context. Muhammadiyah's reformist heritage provides resources for a different approach. Tarjih, tajdid, and the movement's history of institutional problem solving can support disciplined inquiry. The pedagogical objective is committed understanding: students learn the tradition's claims, methods, and reasons deeply enough to inhabit them responsibly and to address new problems without abandoning accountability.

This approach also clarifies why school ethos matters. Ethos is not branding, ceremonial uniformity, or the quantity of religious activities. It is the patterned moral quality of institutional life. A credible AIK ethos emerges when curriculum, relationships, routines, leadership, and decision making communicate compatible values. It remains open to evaluation because its indicators are institutional: fairness, consistency, participation, reflection, service, intellectual seriousness, and responsible conduct.

2. A six-dimensional framework for implementation

On the basis of the documentary findings, this article proposes a six-dimensional framework for diagnosing and developing AIK/ISMUBA implementation. The framework does not replace the 2017 curriculum. It identifies the organizational conditions required to enact that curriculum as an integrated educational project. The dimensions are interdependent. Strong content with weak pedagogy produces recitation; active pedagogy without curricular clarity produces shallow activity; rich school culture without reflection produces ritualism; sophisticated assessment without trust produces surveillance; capable teachers without leadership support produce isolated excellence; and contextual projects without student agency produce managed performance.

Curricular clarity concerns whether teachers and students understand the purposes and progression of AIK/ISMUBA, not merely its topic lists. Pedagogical enactment concerns the balance of explanation, inquiry, practice, dialogue, and application. School culture concerns the congruence of routines, relationships, and adult conduct with the curriculum's values. Assessment alignment concerns whether evidence and feedback correspond to intended knowledge, skills, reasoning, and practice. Teacher and organizational capacity concerns professional knowledge, collaboration, resources, and leadership. Student agency and contextual relevance concern

whether learners can ask questions, make reasoned decisions, and address actual social and digital problems.

The framework can be used for internal review without converting religious formation into a simplistic scorecard. Schools can collect evidence for each dimension, identify contradictions, and select a limited number of improvement priorities. For example, a school with strong routines but weak reflective pedagogy might redesign lessons around the meaning and social implications of those routines. A school with strong subject teaching but fragmented staff culture might develop school-wide ethical protocols and cross-curricular planning. A school with ambitious character indicators but weak assessment validity might replace global personality ratings with contextual observations and student reflection.

Improvement should proceed through cycles of design, enactment, evidence, and revision. This is more defensible than one-off training because implementation problems emerge in practice. Teacher learning communities can examine lesson plans, observe classrooms, review student work, and compare intended with experienced curriculum. Leadership should protect time for this work and connect it to institutional evaluation. The goal is not constant innovation for its own sake, but disciplined improvement of alignment and educational meaning.

Table 2. Six-dimensional framework for coherent AIK/ISMUBA implementation

Dimension	Diagnostic question	Indicative evidence	Development priority
Curricular clarity	Do teachers and students understand aims, progression, and relationships among AIK/ISMUBA domains?	Curriculum maps, vertical progression, cross-subject links, student explanation of purposes.	Reduce repetition and connect knowledge to increasingly complex problems.
Pedagogical enactment	Do learning activities combine accurate instruction with inquiry, practice, dialogue, and application?	Lesson observations, tasks, student questions, case analysis, projects, reflective writing.	Diversify pedagogy without sacrificing conceptual and textual rigor.
School culture	Do routines, relationships, and adult conduct embody the values being taught?	Discipline patterns, staff conduct, worship practices, participation, service, treatment of difference.	Align institutional behavior with formal moral claims.
Assessment alignment	Does assessment provide valid evidence and useful feedback across knowledge, skills, reasoning, and practice?	Balanced instruments, rubrics, portfolios, observations over time, formative feedback.	Avoid cognitive dominance and impressionistic character scoring.
Teacher and organizational capacity	Are staff knowledge, collaboration, resources, scheduling, and leadership sufficient?	Professional learning, joint planning, resource access, workload, coaching, leadership follow-through.	Build collective capacity rather than relying on exceptional individuals.
Student agency and contextual relevance	Can students use AIK/ISMUBA to reason and act in real social,	Student-led inquiry, community projects, media verification, dialogue, reasoned decisions.	Move from managed compliance toward responsible moral agency.

Dimension	Diagnostic question	Indicative evidence	Development priority
	civic, and digital contexts?		

3. Institutional implications and unresolved tensions

The framework has several implications for Muhammadiyah's educational governance. First, national curriculum development should be accompanied by implementation infrastructure. Curriculum books, standards, and training modules are necessary, but schools also need exemplars of pedagogical design, assessment moderation, coaching systems, and mechanisms for sharing practice across regions. A large network can use its scale as a learning resource rather than only as an administrative burden. Schools facing similar problems should not have to invent solutions independently.

Second, teacher professionalism must be defined broadly. Muhammadiyah loyalty or formal religious credentials alone do not guarantee pedagogical competence, while generic teaching competence without movement literacy may weaken institutional meaning. Recruitment and development should therefore combine Islamic scholarship, Muhammadiyah orientation, instructional expertise, assessment literacy, and ethical example. This is demanding, but the alternative is a false choice between ideological commitment and professional quality. The curriculum requires both.

Third, the relationship between standardization and local context remains unresolved. Strong central standards can protect coherence and prevent arbitrary dilution. Yet excessive standardization can suppress contextual responsiveness and teacher judgment. The appropriate balance is principled decentralization: central authorities define purposes, essential knowledge, and ethical boundaries, while schools adapt examples, projects, media, and learning processes to local realities. Adaptation should be documented and evaluated, not treated as either disobedience or unrestricted autonomy.

Fourth, claims about character and tolerance require more rigorous evidence. The pre-2022 literature offers valuable descriptions but remains dominated by single-site qualitative studies and short-term observations. Future research should use longitudinal designs, comparative cases, student work, classroom discourse, and mixed evidence. It should investigate not only whether students participate in activities but how they understand them, whether learning transfers to unfamiliar situations, and how experiences differ by gender, socioeconomic background, religious environment, and school quality. This agenda does not diminish normative commitment; it subjects institutional claims to the ethic of truthfulness.

Finally, AIK/ISMUBA must resist two forms of reduction. The first reduces it to ideological reproduction, making students familiar with organizational vocabulary but unable to address contemporary moral problems. The second reduces it to generic character education, removing the theological, historical, and methodological specificity that makes Muhammadiyah education

distinctive. A defensible implementation holds both together: students acquire substantive knowledge of Islam and Muhammadiyah while developing the judgment and agency to practice that inheritance responsibly in plural, technological, and changing societies.

CONCLUSION

AIK/ISMUBA is the principal curricular mechanism through which Muhammadiyah schools connect Islamic knowledge, movement identity, worship, ethics, Arabic, and social formation. The 2017 curriculum strengthened national coherence by defining standards for content, process, teachers, and assessment. Evidence published through 2021, however, shows that formal coherence does not automatically become pedagogical coherence. Implementation remains vulnerable to subject-centered design, teacher-dominated instruction, limited media, cognitive assessment, uneven professional capacity, and a separation between religious lessons and the wider conduct of the school.

The more promising pattern is not the abandonment of formal curriculum but its extension into a reflective school ethos. Strong implementation combines systematic knowledge with dialogue and application; reinforces lessons through meaningful routines and exemplary institutional conduct; assesses learning through multiple forms of evidence and feedback; develops teachers collectively; and allows students to exercise responsible agency in social and digital contexts. Habituation is useful when connected to understanding, and organizational identity is educationally credible when it supports rather than suppresses disciplined inquiry.

The six-dimensional framework proposed here—curricular clarity, pedagogical enactment, school culture, assessment alignment, teacher and organizational capacity, and student agency and contextual relevance—offers a practical basis for institutional diagnosis. Its central implication is direct: AIK/ISMUBA is not implemented successfully merely because content is scheduled and rituals are visible. It succeeds when the school enables students to understand Muhammadiyah's Islamic tradition, test its ethical meaning in lived situations, and embody it through informed, accountable, and socially constructive action.

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