Integrating Religious Moderation into Education: A Qualitative Analysis of the ASSTA Curriculum in Madrasahs

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ABSTRACT

The internalization of religious moderation is essential in fostering tolerance and harmony in Indonesia's pluralistic society. This study explores how the ASSTA curriculum—comprising the Qur'an, Sunnah, Science, Technology, and Morals—is integrated into the learning process to instill religious moderation in students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools). This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of teachers and students. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires distributed to 20 purposively selected respondents from MI Asy-Syukriyyah in Tangerang. The data were analyzed iteratively using reduction, coding, and thematic analysis. Findings indicate that religious moderation is not explicitly taught as a standalone subject, but is embedded as a "hidden curriculum" throughout various learning activities. Teachers integrate moderation values contextually through discussions, collaborative projects, and real-life applications, aligning with the principles of contextual teaching and learning (CTL). The curriculum's integration resulted in improved student engagement, enhanced understanding of moral values, and increased tolerance in classroom interactions. Quantitative indicators—collected through pre- and post-implementation surveys—show a significant improvement in students' moral awareness and social behavior. The study concludes that the ASSTA-based curriculum offers a strategic framework for embedding religious moderation in early education. However, sustainable implementation requires continuous teacher training, community involvement, and curriculum evaluation. This research contributes to the discourse on Islamic education reform and provides a practical model for integrating moderate religious values within a competency-based curriculum.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society like Indonesia, the internalization of religious moderation in education has become a crucial imperative. Religious moderation—defined as an approach that promotes tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and rejection of extremism—is a fundamental value for preserving national unity and social harmony (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). In this context, educational institutions, particularly madrasahs (Islamic schools), are positioned as vital agents in shaping the next generation to be both religiously devout and socially tolerant.

Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) has declared religious moderation a national priority in educational development, as reflected in its policy frameworks such as the Ministerial Decree No. 328 of 2022, which mandates the formation of working groups to strengthen religious moderation across educational institutions (Rofik & Misbah, 2021). However, despite this national emphasis, there remains a gap between the policy discourse and actual classroom implementation—especially at the elementary education level. Many existing studies and programs focus more on theoretical frameworks or secondary education, leaving a dearth of practical, contextualized models for early childhood and primary schooling (Mutaqin, Ahmad, & Suhartini, 2021).

In response to this gap, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) Asy-Syukriyyah, located in Tangerang City, has initiated a localized curriculum innovation known as ASSTA—an acronym for Al-Qur'an, Sunnah, Science, Technology, and Akhlaq (morals). This curriculum model seeks to integrate religious teachings with scientific and technological literacy while embedding values of moderation across subjects. The ASSTA curriculum represents a holistic educational model that reflects the core values of Islam, yet adapts to contemporary educational challenges by preparing students to be competent in both religious and worldly knowledge (Amin & Rasmuin, 2019).

At the heart of this curriculum lies a significant educational philosophy: the integration of cognitive, affective, and moral domains. The Qur'an and Sunnah are taught not merely for memorization, but for their ethical, contextual, and transformative values. Science and technology are introduced not in isolation, but in harmony with Islamic teachings, nurturing critical thinking, digital literacy, and environmental awareness. Meanwhile, the moral component aims to shape students' character and social behavior, emphasizing values such as compassion, justice, tolerance, and humility (Yusuf, 2024).

The need for such integrated models is further justified by research that highlights the vulnerability of elementary-aged children to narrow ideological influences when religious education is presented in a rigid or abstract manner. Without proper moderation, religious instruction risks producing exclusivist attitudes that conflict with democratic values and social cohesion (Mutaqin et al., 2021). Conversely, educational approaches that embed religious moderation have been shown to improve students' capacity for empathy, respect, and collaboration—skills essential for navigating Indonesia's religiously diverse landscape (Saputera, 2021).

Moreover, data from the Indonesian Tolerance Index show that despite general improvements, some urban areas—such as Tangerang City—still rank relatively low in terms of tolerance levels, placing 37th out of Indonesia's major cities (Yosari, Insiyah, Aiqoni, & Hasan, 2024). This statistic highlights the urgency of implementing value-based education that goes beyond cognitive understanding and targets character formation through school-based interventions. In this regard, the ASSTA curriculum provides a promising model of embedding moderation in early educational experiences, especially in urban Islamic schools.

Despite its potential, the ASSTA model remains under-researched. Few empirical studies have documented how such a curriculum is implemented in actual classroom settings or how it impacts students' attitudes, behavior, and understanding of moderation. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how the ASSTA curriculum is integrated into teaching and learning practices at MI Asy-Syukriyyah, and how it contributes to the internalization of religious moderation values.

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, focusing on the lived experiences of teachers and students in engaging with the curriculum. It aims to explore the implicit and explicit ways in which moderation values are taught and internalized, whether through formal instruction, hidden

curriculum, or extracurricular activities. It also seeks to identify the challenges and enabling factors that affect the success of curriculum integration.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on Islamic education reform in Indonesia. By offering a context-specific, experience-based account of how religious moderation can be integrated into elementary-level Islamic education, the study provides a valuable reference for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers. It also offers practical implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and school-community collaboration in promoting inclusive and moderate religious values.

In conclusion, the integration of religious moderation into primary Islamic education is not only a pedagogical strategy but a national necessity. Through innovations such as the ASSTA curriculum, madrasahs can play a central role in shaping future generations who are spiritually grounded, morally responsible, and socially tolerant. This study aims to critically analyze this curriculum model and provide empirical insights into its implementation and impact.

2. METHOD

This study investigates the integration of the ASSTA curriculum—which comprises the Qur'an, Sunnah, science, technology, and morals—with religious moderation in Islamic elementary schools (madrasah ibtidaiyah). While most existing studies tend to focus on secondary or general education contexts, there remains a significant gap in research related to primary education, which requires a more targeted and nuanced pedagogical approach. This research aims to explore how the ASSTA curriculum is implemented at the elementary level and how its integration with religious moderation contributes to curriculum innovation and character development.

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of teachers and students engaged in curriculum implementation (Creswell, 2015; Creswell, 2018). The focus was on exploring how the values of religious moderation are internalized through the daily learning activities shaped by the ASSTA curriculum.

Data Sources included both primary and secondary data (Sugiyono, 2023). Primary data were obtained through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaire distribution. Observations were conducted to examine the actual classroom practices and school environment where the curriculum is applied. Interviews were carried out with both teachers and students to gain deeper insights into their perceptions, experiences, and challenges regarding curriculum integration. Additionally, structured questionnaires were distributed to support and triangulate the qualitative findings.

The respondents of this study consisted of 20 participants—including teachers and students—selected using purposive sampling to ensure the relevance of the sample to the research objectives (Bungin, 2010). Participants were drawn from MI Asy-Syukriyyah in Tangerang, which has actively implemented the ASSTA curriculum in its instructional process.

Data analysis was conducted using an iterative qualitative method, which involved several key steps: (1) data collection; (2) data reduction; (3) coding and categorization; (4) data display; (5) verification; and (6) drawing conclusions. This analytical framework enabled the researchers to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights that emerged from the participants' narratives and classroom practices.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all respondents or their guardians. The study ensured confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any stage of the research. The researchers also communicated the potential benefits and risks, the intended use of data, and guaranteed transparency in reporting and dissemination.

This methodological framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of how religious moderation is embedded within an integrated curriculum, as well as its influence on students' moral development and classroom dynamics. By focusing on a single case in depth, the study aims to provide

rich, contextualized insights that may inform broader curriculum development efforts in similar educational settings.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. MI Curriculum Innovation Model Based on ASSTA

The ASSTA-based curriculum innovation implemented in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) integrates five core components—the Qur'an, Sunnah, science, technology, and morals—into a cohesive educational framework. This model seeks to produce students who are not only academically proficient but also morally upright and spiritually grounded. The Qur'an and Sunnah serve as the primary sources for instilling ethical values and shaping character, while science and technology are introduced to prepare students to navigate the challenges of an increasingly complex, digital world (Amin & Rasmuin, 2019; Dito & Pujiastuti, 2021; Yusuf, 2024). Through this integration, the ASSTA model aims to nurture students who are balanced in both religious understanding and contemporary competencies.

Within this model, Qur'anic education extends beyond rote memorization to include contextual understanding and application in daily life. Students are encouraged to reflect on the meanings of Qur'anic verses and implement them in their interactions and decisions. Similarly, the teaching of the Sunnah focuses on internalizing the Prophet Muhammad's exemplary character traits—such as honesty, patience, and compassion—thus laying the foundation for students to become positive role models in their communities.

Science and technology are not treated as secular domains but are interwoven with religious teachings to emphasize the harmony between faith and reason. Science is taught through inquiry-based and hands-on methods that allow students to explore their environment, while technology is introduced as a tool for learning enhancement and responsible digital engagement (Interview, 2024). This dual approach fosters a more engaging and meaningful learning experience that encourages critical thinking and adaptability.

The moral dimension is a central pillar of the ASSTA curriculum. Students are taught to demonstrate empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect—values that are reinforced both in formal lessons and through co-curricular and extracurricular activities (Interview, 2024). Moral education is designed to be holistic, shaping students' behavior not only within the classroom but also in the broader social context.

In practice, the curriculum also adopts project-based learning strategies, which allow students to apply knowledge while contributing to real-world issues. Projects focused on environmental conservation or social welfare not only enhance cognitive understanding but also instill a sense of responsibility and cooperation. This approach strengthens key soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and leadership—competencies that are increasingly essential in the 21st-century workforce.

A notable strength of the ASSTA model is its collaborative orientation. The curriculum actively involves parents and the local community in the educational process. Parents are encouraged to support their children's character development and learning at home, while schools work in partnership with community leaders to reinforce the values taught in class (Interview, 2024). This shared responsibility helps create a consistent and supportive learning environment that extends beyond the school walls.

The success of this model also depends heavily on teacher preparedness. Educators are required to deeply understand the ASSTA philosophy and how to integrate it into their lesson planning and classroom practices. As such, regular teacher training and professional development programs are essential to enhance pedagogical competence and ensure that teachers can effectively deliver content that aligns with the curriculum's integrative goals. Well-trained, inspirational teachers can significantly influence student motivation and learning outcomes.

Another important feature of the curriculum is its holistic evaluation system. Assessment is designed to measure not only cognitive performance but also affective and psychomotor domains. This comprehensive approach provides a fuller picture of student development and allows for constructive feedback that supports continuous improvement. Competency-based assessments are used to evaluate how well students apply knowledge, demonstrate moral reasoning, and engage in collaborative problem-solving.

The implementation of the ASSTA model requires a strong commitment from all stakeholders. Schools, educators, parents, and the community must work together to ensure the curriculum's objectives are met. When collaboration is effective, the curriculum can be implemented smoothly and deliver a significant impact on students' academic and moral growth. In the long run, the ASSTA model positions *madrasah ibtidaiyah* as institutions capable of producing well-rounded individuals ready to face global challenges while remaining anchored in Islamic values.

Concrete examples from the field illustrate the curriculum's integrative nature. For instance, one lesson combines Qur'anic studies with science by exploring ecosystems through the lens of creation verses. Students observe nature directly in gardens or parks and connect their observations with religious teachings on the importance of environmental stewardship (Observation, 2024). In another case, students use interactive digital applications based on Hadith to learn about manners and Islamic history. These tools not only enhance their religious understanding but also develop their digital literacy and reflective thinking (Observation, 2024).

Quantitative data gathered through pre- and post-implementation surveys reveal a notable impact of the ASSTA model. Before the integration, only 40% of students demonstrated a good understanding of subject matter, while after implementation, the number rose to 60%. Similarly, the proportion of students able to relate theoretical knowledge to practical application increased from 35% to 70%. This suggests that the curriculum fosters more meaningful and contextual learning experiences.

The moral awareness of students also improved significantly. Initially, only 25% of students expressed awareness of the importance of moral values. After the curriculum was applied, this figure jumped to 85%, indicating the model's success in shaping character and ethical sensitivity. Additionally, student engagement in learning activities rose dramatically—from 25% before implementation to 85% afterward—highlighting the curriculum's effectiveness in promoting active participation through interactive and project-based methods.

Academic performance showed a similar upward trend. Prior to using the ASSTA model, only 50% of students achieved average scores on assessments. After implementation, this increased to 70%, demonstrating improved comprehension and application of knowledge across disciplines. These findings confirm the effectiveness of the ASSTA model in enhancing both academic achievement and character formation within the *madrasah ibtidaiyah* setting.

In conclusion, the ASSTA-based curriculum innovation model offers a promising framework for integrating religious values with modern education in Islamic elementary schools. It aligns spiritual development with scientific inquiry and moral education with digital competency. The results of this study underscore the potential of such a model to produce balanced, competent, and morally responsible learners. However, for sustained impact, continuous evaluation, teacher training, and stakeholder collaboration are essential components in supporting the model's long-term success.

3.2. Integration of the MI Curriculum Innovation Model Based on ASSTA with Religious Moderation

The integration of the ASSTA-based curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI)—which encompasses the Qur'an, Sunnah, Science, Technology, and Morals—represents a strategic effort to address the demands of 21st-century education while preserving religious and cultural identity. By embedding spiritual and ethical values into learning, this curriculum seeks to cultivate students who are not only academically capable but also morally upright. The Qur'an and Sunnah serve as the foundational sources for shaping character and ethical reasoning, while science and technology prepare students to

thrive in a rapidly evolving world. Within this framework, religious moderation is positioned as a key pillar for fostering a peaceful, inclusive, and tolerant learning environment.

Importantly, the integration of religious moderation in the ASSTA curriculum is not confined to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects. Instead, it extends across general subjects, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. This cross-disciplinary integration aligns with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which emphasizes connecting academic content with students' real-life experiences and social environments (Johnson, 2002). In this context, religious moderation becomes a lived experience rather than abstract doctrine. For example, when teaching tolerance, educators do not merely cite religious texts but link the values to real situations, such as differences in ethnicity, cultural traditions, or even preferences in sports teams. These learning experiences reflect the five key CTL strategies: *relating, experiencing, applying, cooperating*, and *transferring*.

In practice, teachers use storytelling, case studies, and class discussions to help students relate moderation values to their personal experiences. Role-play and group simulations encourage students to apply these values in everyday interactions—whether in classrooms, playgrounds, or cafeterias. Cooperative learning projects involving students from diverse backgrounds help build mutual respect and inclusivity. Most importantly, students are guided to transfer their understanding and practice of religious moderation beyond school, into their families and communities. This reinforces the idea that moderation is not a temporary learning goal but a long-term value and way of life.

To implement this approach effectively, innovation in teaching methods is necessary. Teachers must possess a solid understanding of how to integrate religious, scientific, and technological knowledge within a single framework. The use of digital tools and interactive media enhances student engagement and comprehension. Interactive and collaborative learning strategies not only strengthen students' academic competencies but also nurture soft skills such as confidence, empathy, and social responsibility. In this way, ASSTA provides a platform for character education that goes beyond moral instruction to practical formation of behavior.

Moral development is emphasized throughout the ASSTA curriculum. By combining lessons from the Qur'an and Sunnah with classroom subjects, students are encouraged to internalize and apply moral values in daily life. Religious moderation is embedded within this moral education, promoting respect for differences, peaceful coexistence, and rejection of extremism. Thus, schools become not just places of academic learning but also agents of social transformation, cultivating future citizens with a balanced worldview.

Furthermore, the curriculum provides students with opportunities to explore science and technology through an Islamic lens. Students are trained to think critically, act responsibly, and make informed decisions rooted in both faith and reason. This promotes a generation of learners who are not passive consumers of technology, but reflective innovators capable of aligning technological advancements with ethical and religious values.

Interfaith understanding is also an important component of this integration. Students are exposed to dialogues, simulations, and cooperative projects that encourage them to appreciate religious diversity. In doing so, they build openness and empathy—traits essential for thriving in pluralistic societies. Education, therefore, becomes a bridge between cultures and religions, enabling students to live peacefully amidst diversity.

Successful implementation of the ASSTA curriculum requires collective commitment from teachers, parents, school leaders, and the broader community. Parental involvement is vital to reinforce school-taught values at home, while community support ensures that students receive consistent messages about moderation and tolerance. Effective curriculum integration cannot occur in isolation; it must be supported by a synergistic ecosystem.

One of the main challenges in adopting this curriculum model is resistance to change, especially among teachers unaccustomed to interdisciplinary or values-based pedagogy. To address this, continuous professional development is essential. Government initiatives such as the *Continuous*

Professional Development Program for Islamic Religious Education Teachers (PPKB GPAI) are vital in equipping educators with the tools and mindset necessary to integrate moderation values (Chadidjah, 2021). Specific training in curriculum design, development of moderation-infused teaching materials, and assessment practices should be prioritized. Without such institutional support, the long-term sustainability of the integration model may be compromised.

Ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the ASSTA curriculum's implementation are critical for maintaining its effectiveness. Gathering feedback from teachers, students, and parents allows for timely adjustments and curriculum refinement. Learning outcome data, especially those related to moral and social behaviors, should be analyzed to assess how deeply the values of religious moderation are being internalized. Data-driven decisions will ensure that curriculum development remains responsive and adaptive to real challenges.

The success of the ASSTA model also hinges on school culture. A culture that promotes collaboration, innovation, and respect is essential for meaningful integration. Schools must foster an environment where students feel safe, valued, and encouraged to engage with diverse perspectives. In such a setting, religious moderation becomes more than a curriculum component—it becomes a lived and shared value within the school community.

A concrete example of ASSTA integration is the implementation of community-based projects, where students engage in social service informed by Islamic teachings. For instance, students may participate in environmental clean-up campaigns while reflecting on Qur'anic verses about nature and stewardship. In this way, religious teachings are translated into social action, reinforcing values such as responsibility, cooperation, and empathy.

In science instruction, teachers incorporate Qur'anic themes when explaining natural phenomena like photosynthesis or ecosystems. Students are encouraged to contemplate how scientific principles affirm the greatness of God's creation. Lab activities are not only scientific exercises but also moral learning spaces, where students are taught respect, collaboration, and ethical reflection.

Technology is also strategically integrated to reinforce both religious understanding and 21st-century skills. Students use apps to explore Hadith, participate in virtual Islamic storytelling, and create multimedia projects that connect religious teachings with social issues. These activities promote both digital fluency and values-based learning, helping students navigate digital spaces with awareness and respect for others.

In essence, integration in the ASSTA model refers to the process of harmonizing multiple domains—religious, scientific, technological, and moral—into a unified educational experience. As Rafiq (2017) and Suprapto (2020) suggest, integration entails coordinated function and coherence across all curriculum components to achieve shared learning goals.

Finally, based on a survey conducted before and after ASSTA implementation, there was a significant increase in students' understanding and application of key values. For example, understanding of moderation rose from 40% to 60%, while practical application improved from 35% to 70%. Awareness of moral values increased from 25% to 85%, and student engagement in learning rose from 25% to 85%. These findings demonstrate the ASSTA curriculum's effectiveness in embedding religious moderation as a lived educational experience.

Table 1. Comparison of Student Understanding and Engagement Before and After Implementation of the ASSTA-Based Curriculum

Indicator	Before	After
Limited Understanding	40%	60%
Lack of Practical Application	35%	70%
Unclear Moral Values	30%	70%
Low engagement	25%	85%
Average Evaluation Results	50%	70%

Another effective strategy for integrating the ASSTA curriculum is through discussion forums and seminar activities conducted within the school environment. These platforms allow students to engage with contemporary issues that bridge religious and scientific domains, such as climate change, public health, or social justice. In such activities, students are encouraged to actively participate in discussions, listen respectfully to differing viewpoints, and develop an attitude of openness and tolerance. By inviting guest speakers from diverse backgrounds—including religious leaders, scientists, and community activists—students are exposed to various perspectives on religious moderation. This not only enriches their academic understanding but also fosters the development of inclusive, socially conscious individuals who are prepared to contribute meaningfully to society.

While previous studies have provided foundational insights into the urgency, conceptual frameworks, and obstacles involved in instilling religious moderation in primary education, significant research gaps remain. There is a pressing need for more innovative and longitudinal studies, particularly those that develop and evaluate practical intervention models, measure long-term behavioral outcomes, and explore the broader role of schools within the social ecosystem. Without this depth of understanding, efforts to internalize the values of moderation may remain fragmented and short-lived.

The internalization of religious moderation, as evidenced in this study, aligns with the affective domain of Bloom's Taxonomy (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). This domain focuses on students' emotional responses, value systems, attitudes, and motivations. The process of internalization can be described in five stages: (1) *Receiving*, where students become aware of the value of moderation (e.g., when teachers introduce the concept of tolerance); (2) *Responding*, demonstrated by students participating in discussions, asking questions, or engaging in co-curricular activities; (3) *Valuing*, where students begin to appreciate the importance of religious moderation as a positive and necessary social principle; (4) *Organization*, in which students integrate moderation into their broader belief systems; and (5) *Characterization*, where moderation becomes a consistent and defining element of their behavior and identity.

The findings of this study suggest that most students in the observed setting have reached at least the "valuing" stage, with emerging signs of "organization". Teachers play a critical role in facilitating this progression—not only by delivering content but by shaping classroom culture and emotional tone. However, the transition from awareness to full internalization (characterization) remains a key challenge. For moderation to become a natural and autonomous part of students' character, a sustained, systemic approach is required. This includes long-term strategies that go beyond cognitive instruction and deeply engage the emotional and behavioral dimensions of learning. It also requires the active collaboration of the entire education ecosystem—schools, families, and communities.

Despite the effectiveness of contextual learning (CTL) and its alignment with affective goals, several implementation challenges were identified. For instance, students' exposure to social media content often contradicts the moderation values taught at school. Additionally, teachers' understanding

and capacity to implement contextual and affective learning strategies vary considerably. These inconsistencies create barriers to achieving the curriculum's full potential. Therefore, continuous professional development is essential. Teachers must receive targeted training in designing affective-rich learning experiences, managing discussions around sensitive topics, and utilizing contextual methods that resonate with students' lived realities.

Furthermore, the success of the ASSTA curriculum's integration is contingent on multi-level collaboration. Madrasahs must build partnerships with families and communities to create a consistent moral environment. Without such coherence, students may experience cognitive dissonance between school-based learning and real-life exposure. This is especially critical in today's digitally saturated and ideologically fragmented society.

It is important to acknowledge that this study is a single case study, focused on one madrasah that has implemented the ASSTA curriculum. While the qualitative depth offers valuable insights, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The results may not be directly generalizable to other educational settings with differing institutional cultures, teacher competencies, or student demographics. Nevertheless, this study provides a contextualized model that can inform further research and inspire adaptation in similar educational environments.

4.   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the integration of the ASSTA curriculum—comprising the Qur'an, Sunnah, Science, Technology, and Morals—with religious moderation can be effectively internalized through everyday learning processes in *madrasah ibtidaiyah*. This integration does not occur solely through explicit instruction, but also through hidden curriculum elements embedded across subjects and activities, where moderation values are subtly reinforced. The findings highlight that such an approach contributes to fostering students' tolerance, empathy, and moral awareness from an early age. However, the study is limited in scope as it focuses on a single madrasah, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Moreover, it does not fully explore the role of digital learning media or the long-term behavioral outcomes of the integration. Therefore, future research is encouraged to develop more comprehensive models that assess the integration of religious moderation in diverse educational contexts, including the use of technology-enhanced learning tools, longitudinal impacts, and cross-institutional comparisons to deepen understanding and improve practical implementation.

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