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Evaluating Curriculum Alignment in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education: A Qualitative Study of Graduate Competencies and Stakeholder Expectations

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates curriculum alignment in the English Education Department at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, focusing on graduate competencies and stakeholder expectations. A qualitative evaluative design was employed through curriculum document analysis and semi-structured interviews with programme coordinators, curriculum developers, lecturers, students, alumni, school principals, and English teachers. Data were analysed by mapping Programme Learning Outcomes, Course Learning Outcomes, learning activities, and assessment, followed by thematic analysis and triangulation of the findings. The results indicate that the curriculum demonstrates structural alignment among graduate profiles, learning outcomes, course content, instructional activities, and assessment. However, maintaining this alignment remains challenging due to changing educational and professional demands, the need to balance theoretical knowledge and teaching practice, limited credit allocations, and the growing importance of digital and artificial intelligence literacy. Stakeholder perspectives also highlight the need to strengthen pedagogical skills, professional readiness, critical thinking, communication, and responsible technology use. Based on these findings, the study proposes an Integrated Curriculum Alignment Framework comprising five interconnected stages: competency identification, curriculum mapping and alignment, learning implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. This framework supports the development of adaptive, stakeholder-responsive curricula by integrating academic, pedagogical, professional, digital, and Islamic values within English teacher education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of higher education in the era of globalization and digital transformation requires universities to ensure their curricula align with workforce needs,

advance knowledge, and meet the demands of 21st-century skills [1]. The curriculum not only guides learning, but also serves as a strategic tool for producing graduates with knowledge, skills, professional attitudes, and adaptability. In that context, curriculum alignment (curriculum alignment) becomes an important aspect to ensure the connection between graduate learning outcomes, course materials, the learning process, and the competencies needed by society [2].

In Islamic higher education in Indonesia, curriculum development has special characteristics because it must blend academic and professional skills with Islamic values. Islamic universities are expected to produce graduates who are not only strong in knowledge and technology, but also have moral integrity, social responsibility, and a religious character [3]. Therefore, the curriculum must be designed comprehensively to accommodate scientific developments while maintaining Islamic values as the foundation for shaping graduates' character.

In the context of the English Education Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, curriculum alignment is important to ensure students gain the competencies needed for the profession and keep pace with developments in English language learning. These competencies include mastering language skills, linguistic understanding, pedagogical abilities, teaching material development, digital technology use, and intercultural communication skills. In addition, graduates are expected to integrate Islamic values into their teaching practice, so they have a professional, ethical character and respond to society's needs.

Evaluating curriculum alignment also requires considering the expectations of various stakeholders, such as lecturers, students, alumni, program managers, and graduate employers. Each stakeholder has their own view on the competencies graduates should have. For example, the education world needs teachers who can design learning, manage classrooms, use educational technology, and assess learning outcomes [4]. Meanwhile, the working world demands communication skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. These differences show the importance of continuously evaluating the curriculum to identify alignment and gaps between the competencies developed through education and the skills employers expect.

Based on these issues, this study aims to evaluate the alignment of the English Education Study Program curriculum at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra with graduate competencies and stakeholder expectations. The research uses a qualitative approach to explore perceptions, experiences, and assessments from various parties regarding curriculum relevance, teaching implementation, and graduates' readiness to meet professional needs. The results are expected to identify competency matches and gaps and recommend ways to develop a curriculum that is more adaptive, integrative, relevant, and oriented toward the needs of both education and the workforce. Specifically, this study is also expected to strengthen the development of an Islamic higher education model that can integrate academic excellence, professionalism, and Islamic values.

Research on the alignment of higher education curricula has been conducted from various perspectives. Sholeh & Murhayati examined the development of an employability-based curriculum through a multi-stakeholder approach and highlighted the importance of

the relationship between universities and the workforce [5]. Antoni et al. studied the development of a critical curriculum in the English teacher education program in Indonesia, focusing on involving students and learners in shaping the curriculum [6]. Meanwhile, Hasan et al. identified competency gaps among graduates of Islamic universities from the stakeholders' perspective, especially in knowledge mastery, communication, problem-solving, and digital skills [7].

Although previous research has discussed curriculum relevance, the development of English teacher education, and graduate competency gaps, studies still need to integrate these three aspects to evaluate the curriculum in Islamic higher education. The research gap lies in the limited studies that assess the relationship between curriculum design, learning implementation, actual graduate competencies, and the expectations of various stakeholders in the context of English Education Study Programs at Islamic universities.

This study's novelty lies in qualitatively evaluating curriculum alignment by integrating the perspectives of lecturers, students, alumni, study program managers, and graduate users. This research not only identifies the suitability of academic, linguistic, pedagogical, professional, and digital competencies with job market needs, but also considers the integration of Islamic values as a characteristic of Islamic higher education. This focus is expected to produce recommendations for curriculum development that are more adaptive, relevant, and oriented towards the needs of stakeholders in the English Education Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an evaluative design (qualitative evaluative research) to analyze the alignment of the curriculum with graduate competencies and stakeholders' expectations in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Education and Teaching Sciences, State Islamic University of North Sumatra. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the alignment among the planned curriculum, learning implementation, and graduates' professional competency needs. The evaluation was conducted through document analysis and semi-structured interviews with reference to [8].

The research was conducted in the English Education Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra and involved informants selected through purposive sampling. The informants included the program coordinator, curriculum development team members, English lecturers, current students, alumni, school principals, and English teachers. The selection of informants was based on their involvement and experience in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as their understanding of the competencies required for graduates. The research considered how well the curriculum aligns with the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), the National Higher Education Standards (SN-Dikti), and the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE).

Data were collected through document review and semi-structured interviews. The documents analyzed included curriculum structures and Programme Learning Outcomes (PLO), Course Learning Outcomes (CLO), Semester Learning Plan (RPS), graduate competency standards, and institutional curriculum development policies. Document

analysis was conducted to identify the links between courses, learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment systems. Meanwhile, interviews were aimed at exploring informants' views on curriculum relevance, graduate competency needs, the alignment of learning with professional requirements, and gaps between planned competencies and the demands of the job market. The interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and transcribed verbatim [9].

Data analysis was carried out through two complementary stages. First, document analysis mapped connections among PLOs, CLOs, course material, learning activities, and assessments to identify continuity of competencies, repetition of material, achievements not yet accommodated, and gaps between objectives and learning evaluations. Second, interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the stages [10]: understanding the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation of results. Next, the two data sources were compared to identify matches, partial alignments, and mismatches between the curriculum documents and stakeholders' experiences and expectations.

The validity of the data is ensured through four criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as stated in [11]. Credibility is strengthened through method triangulation by comparing document analysis results with interviews, as well as through member checking with selected informants. Transferability is supported by contextual descriptions of the study program characteristics and research setting, while dependability is maintained through documentation of the data collection process, coding, curriculum mapping, and theme development. Confirmability is ensured by basing every interpretation on document evidence or informant statements so the research results are scientifically accountable.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1 Alignment of Graduate Competencies in the curriculum

Based on the results of the observation of the curriculum documents of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, it was found that the curriculum structure demonstrates alignment among graduate profiles, Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs), Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), course materials, learning activities, and assessment systems. The course structure illustrates a gradual progression in students' competency development, beginning with the mastery of fundamental linguistics and educational sciences, followed by curriculum development, instructional material design, microteaching, teaching practice, educational research, and technology-assisted learning.

The observation results also indicate that the course composition encompasses several dimensions of graduate competencies, including linguistic, pedagogical, professional, digital, and teacher ethics competencies. The alignment between courses and learning outcomes reflects the study program's efforts to establish continuity in the learning process, progressing from theoretical knowledge acquisition to the application of professional skills. Furthermore, the inclusion of courses related to teaching methodologies, instructional media, and teaching practice demonstrates the program's commitment to developing students' capabilities as prospective English language teachers.

Nevertheless, the document analysis reveals that curriculum development still needs to place greater emphasis on digital literacy, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and continuous professional learning. Although several of these competencies appear in course descriptions, they are not yet fully articulated as explicitly integrated learning outcomes across the curriculum. Thus, the findings suggest that the curriculum has established a relatively systematic structural alignment; however, further refinement is necessary to ensure greater responsiveness to technological developments and the evolving competency requirements of graduates in the education sector. These observational findings are also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

Table 1. Interview Findings on Curriculum Alignment and Graduate Competencies

Aspect	Informant	Interview Findings
Basis for determining graduate competencies	Head of the Study Program	*"The formulation of graduate competencies refers to the vision and mission of the study program, the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-Dikti), and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles, while taking into account the needs of the education sector."*
Alignment of GLOs, CLOs, and courses	Curriculum Development Team Member	*"Each course is designed to support the Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs) through the formulation of Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), learning materials, classroom activities, and assessment systems."*
Implementation of pedagogical and professional competencies	English Lecturer	*"Students do not merely study language and educational theories; they also develop teaching skills through microteaching and practical teaching activities."*
Acquisition of competencies during coursework	Active Student	*"The courses help us improve our English proficiency, understand teaching methods, develop instructional media, and gain practical teaching experience."*
Relevance of graduate competencies to labor market needs	Graduate/Alumnus	*"The English language proficiency and teaching skills acquired during our studies have been quite helpful in our professional work, although we still need to develop our abilities to meet the demands of the workplace."*
Alignment of graduate competencies with school requirements	School Principal	*"Schools require graduates who have a strong command of English subject matter, are capable of managing classrooms, can design instructional activities, and demonstrate discipline and a sense of responsibility as educators."*
Graduate readiness for English language teaching practice	English Teacher	*"Prospective teachers need to be able to deliver instructional content, select appropriate teaching methods, utilize instructional media, and assess students' learning outcomes."*
Integration of digital literacy and Artificial Intelligence (AI)	English Lecturer	*"The use of digital technology and AI needs to be strengthened in the learning process so that students can develop instructional media, access learning resources, and utilize technology responsibly."*
Critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and reflective skills	Active Student/Graduate	*"In addition to academic abilities, we also need to develop communication skills, teamwork, critical thinking, and the ability to evaluate the learning process."*
Challenges in curriculum development and evaluation	Head of the Study Program/Curriculum Development Team	*"One of our greatest challenges is ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant to the constantly changing needs of education and the labor market, particularly in response to technological developments and digital learning."*

Source: Interviews with the research informants.

Overall, the research findings indicate that the English Education Study Program curriculum at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara has established structural alignment among graduate profiles, Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs), Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), courses, and the competency requirements of prospective English language teachers. Curriculum development has been guided by the institution's vision and mission, the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-Dikti), and OBE principles, while also considering stakeholder input. Nevertheless, the development of digital competencies and the integration of Artificial Intelligence, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration need further strengthening to make the curriculum more adaptive to technological advancements and labor market demands. Therefore, continuous curriculum evaluation and refinement are essential to ensure that graduate competencies remain relevant to the needs of the education sector and the expectations of various stakeholders.

3.1.2 Conditions That Shape Curriculum Alignment

Based on the observation of the curriculum documents of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, institutional policies were found to be one of the fundamental foundations for curriculum formulation and development. This is reflected in the formulation of graduate profiles and learning outcomes, which are oriented toward integrating academic and professional competencies with Islamic values. This orientation indicates that the curriculum not only emphasizes the mastery of knowledge and English language teaching skills but also focuses on character development and the ethical formation of graduates as prospective educators.

The observation results also indicate that the curriculum structure refers to higher education standards, particularly the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia/KKNI) and the National Standards for Higher Education (Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi/SN-Dikti), while implementing the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE). These references are reflected in the alignment among Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs), Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), course materials, learning activities, and assessment systems. Furthermore, curriculum evaluation mechanisms such as tracer studies, graduate user surveys, and consultations with schools show opportunities to incorporate stakeholder needs into developing graduate competencies.

Beyond institutional and regulatory aspects, the findings indicate that technological developments have also become an important consideration in curriculum development. This is reflected in the inclusion of courses on teaching methodologies, instructional media, assessment, microteaching, and teaching practice, which are relevant to using digital technology. Nevertheless, the development of students' abilities to use Artificial Intelligence (AI)-assisted tools, critically evaluate technological outputs, and apply technology responsibly still needs to be integrated more explicitly into learning outcomes and instructional activities. Thus, curriculum alignment is influenced by the interrelationship among institutional policies, educational regulations, stakeholder needs, and technological

developments. These observational findings are also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

Table 2. Interview Findings on Factors Influencing Curriculum Alignment

Aspect	Informant	Interview Findings
Institutional policies in determining graduate profiles	Head of the Study Program	*"Graduate profiles are formulated based on the institution's vision and mission by integrating English language proficiency, teaching skills, and Islamic values."*
Integration of professional competencies and Islamic values	Curriculum Development Team Member	*"The curriculum integrates teaching competencies with Islamic values, responsibility, ethics, and discipline."*
Implementation of KKNI, SN-Dikti, and OBE	Head of the Study Program/Curriculum Development Team	*"The curriculum refers to KKNI and SN-Dikti and implements OBE through the alignment of GLOs, CLOs, learning materials, instructional activities, and assessment."*
Implementation of curriculum standards	English Lecturer	*"The learning process combines linguistic theories and teaching methodologies with presentations, instructional material development, and microteaching."*
Students' learning experiences	Active Student	*"The courses provide us with opportunities to understand theories, develop instructional media, and conduct teaching simulations."*
Alignment of competencies with professional requirements	Graduate/Alumnus	*"English language proficiency, instructional material development, and communication skills are helpful in our professional work, but they still need to be further developed in accordance with workplace requirements."*
Schools' input regarding graduate competencies	School Principal	*"Graduates are expected to master the subject matter, manage classrooms, develop instructional documents, and demonstrate discipline and adaptability."*
Alignment of competencies with instructional needs	English Teacher	*"Teachers need to master the subject matter, select appropriate teaching methods, utilize instructional media, and conduct assessments."*
Utilization of digital technology and AI	English Lecturer/Curriculum Development Team	*"Students need to utilize digital resources and AI to develop instructional materials, but they must also verify the accuracy of the generated outputs."*
Critical and responsible use of technology	Active Student/Graduate	*"Digital applications and AI support the learning process, but the information they generate must be reviewed to ensure its relevance to instructional needs."*

Source: Interviews with the research informants.

Based on the research findings, curriculum alignment in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara is influenced by institutional policies, the implementation of KKNI, SN-Dikti, and OBE, the integration of Islamic values, and stakeholder needs. The curriculum incorporates academic, professional, and pedagogical competencies, as well as technology use in the learning process. However, digital literacy and the ability to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) critically, accurately, and responsibly still

need strengthening to ensure graduate competencies are increasingly aligned with the demands of the education sector and professional requirements.

3.1.3 Difficulties in Maintaining Curriculum Alignment

Based on the results of the observation of the curriculum documents of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, it was found that the curriculum structure needs to take into account the evolving demands of education, technology, and the labor market. These developments are closely related to the increasing professional competency requirements for graduates, particularly in English language proficiency, pedagogical skills, educational research, teaching practice, and the utilization of educational technology. Therefore, curriculum relevance should be reviewed periodically to ensure learning outcomes remain aligned with developments in educational practices.

The observation results also indicate that the mapping of Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) requires continuity and coherence across courses. Such alignment is essential to ensure that each course contributes proportionately to the achievement of graduate competencies without creating unnecessary content repetition or imbalances in learning materials. Furthermore, the course composition highlights the need to balance theoretical knowledge, pedagogical competencies, research, teaching practice, and technological skills within the curriculum structure.

Furthermore, observations of the curriculum structure and course distribution reveal that limitations in the allocation of semester credit units (SKS) require learning content to be organized proportionately. The curriculum must also meet schools' practical needs while maintaining conceptual depth and supporting students' academic development. Thus, the findings indicate that periodic curriculum mapping, coordination among lecturers, and reviews of learning outcomes are essential to maintaining curriculum continuity and relevance to graduate competency requirements. These observational findings are also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

Table 3. Interview Findings on the Challenges of Maintaining Curriculum Alignment

Aspect	Informant	Interview Findings
Changing educational and labor market needs	Head of the Study Program	*"Our main challenge is ensuring that the curriculum remains relevant to the constantly changing needs of education and the labor market, particularly in response to technological developments and evolving approaches to English language teaching."*
Coordination of GLOs and CLOs across courses	Curriculum Development Team Member	*"We need to ensure that all courses mutually support the achievement of GLOs and CLOs so that there is neither unnecessary repetition of materials nor any competencies left unaddressed."*
Balance between theory and instructional practice	English Lecturer	*"The challenge lies in balancing theoretical content, pedagogy, research, and teaching practice so that students acquire both knowledge and professional experience."*
Limitations in semester credit allocation	Head of the Study Program	*"The available number of credit units requires us to select and organize learning materials proportionately so that all essential competencies can still be provided to students."*

Aspect	Informant	Interview Findings
Experiences in addressing instructional demands	Active Student	*"We sometimes need more opportunities to practice teaching because understanding theories alone is insufficient to prepare us for actual classroom learning situations."*
Adapting competencies to workplace requirements	Graduate/Alumnus	*"When entering the workforce, we encounter increasingly diverse skill requirements, particularly in the use of technology, communication, and the adaptation of teaching methods."*
Schools' expectations regarding graduate readiness	School Principal	*"We prioritize graduates who are ready to teach, capable of managing classrooms, able to prepare instructional documents, and understand students' individual characteristics."*
Practical competency requirements for English teachers	English Teacher	*"Prospective teachers need sufficient practical experience, mastery of the subject matter, the ability to use instructional media, and the capacity to adapt teaching methods to students' needs."*
Differences between academic and professional expectations	Head of the Study Program/Curriculum Development Team	*"Higher education institutions need to maintain theoretical depth and students' academic abilities, whereas schools expect graduates to be better prepared for practical teaching activities. Both needs must be accommodated within the curriculum."*
Curriculum evaluation and revision	Curriculum Development Team Member	*"Curriculum evaluation needs to be conducted periodically by involving lecturers, alumni, and graduate users so that changes in educational needs can be taken into consideration in curriculum improvement."*

Source: Interview themes developed based on the research focus.

Based on the research findings, the main challenges in maintaining curriculum alignment in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara include changing educational and labor market needs, the continuity of GLO and CLO mapping, the balance between theory and practice, and limitations in semester credit allocation. In addition, the program needs to increase teaching practice opportunities and align graduate competencies with school expectations and technological developments. Therefore, periodic evaluation, coordination among lecturers, and stakeholder involvement are necessary to maintain curriculum relevance and quality.

3.1.4 Framework for Integrated Curriculum Alignment

Based on observations of the curriculum documents of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, five main stages were identified within the integrated curriculum alignment framework: identification of graduate competencies, curriculum mapping and alignment, learning implementation, evaluation, and curriculum improvement. The competency identification stage is reflected in the formulation of graduate profiles, which refer to the institution's vision and mission, the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-Dikti), Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles, and stakeholder needs. These competencies are subsequently translated into Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLOs), Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), course materials, learning activities, and assessment systems.

The observation results also indicate that the curriculum structure connects instructional planning, the implementation of academic activities, and professional practice.

This implementation is reflected in courses that support the acquisition of knowledge, pedagogical skills, teaching practice, and students' professional competencies. Furthermore, the curriculum documents demonstrate evaluation mechanisms through learning assessments, tracer studies, graduate user surveys, and stakeholder consultations. These evaluations provide a basis for reviewing learning outcomes, course materials, and the development of graduate competencies in subsequent curriculum development cycles.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that these five stages form a continuous curriculum development cycle, with digital technological advancements and Artificial Intelligence (AI) influencing each stage. Technology's influence is evident in the need to update course materials, instructional strategies, assessment systems, and students' professional practices. Thus, the integrated curriculum alignment framework shows that curriculum development is not only about administrative conformity of instructional documents but also about ensuring the continuity of academic, professional, and digital competencies, as well as Islamic values, to remain relevant to educational developments and stakeholder needs. These observational findings are also consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

Table 4. Interview Findings on the Integrated Curriculum Alignment Framework

Stages/Aspects	Informant	Interview Findings
Identification of competencies based on institutional vision, mission, and educational standards	Head of the Study Program	*"We determine graduate competencies based on the vision and mission of the study program, KKNI, SN-Dikti, and the needs of the education sector to ensure that graduate profiles are aligned with institutional objectives."*
Translation of competencies into GLOs and CLOs	Curriculum Development Team Member	*"Graduate competencies are translated into GLOs and CLOs, which are then aligned with the materials, learning activities, and assessment methods of each course."*
Implementation of academic learning and professional practice	English Lecturer	*"We combine theoretical learning with practical activities through discussions, presentations, instructional material development, microteaching, and teaching practice."*
Students' experiences in curriculum implementation	Active Student	*"We receive theoretical instruction and opportunities for teaching practice, enabling us to develop our English language proficiency, pedagogical skills, and self-confidence."*
Evaluation of competencies based on professional experience	Graduate/Alumnus	*"The experiences gained during our studies provide a foundation for our professional work; however, we still need to develop our competencies to adapt to changing workplace requirements and environments."*
Feedback on graduate readiness	School Principal	*"Graduate evaluation needs to consider teaching abilities, subject matter mastery, classroom management, discipline, and the ability to adapt to school requirements."*
Evaluation of instructional implementation in schools	English Teacher	*"Graduate competencies can be assessed through their ability to design lessons, deliver instructional materials, utilize media, and evaluate students' learning outcomes."*

Stages/Aspects	Informant	Interview Findings
Evaluation and stakeholder feedback	Head of the Study Program/Curriculum Development Team Member	*"Feedback from alumni, schools, and graduate users is essential for identifying which competencies are already aligned with expectations and which aspects of the curriculum still need improvement."*
Curriculum improvement and revision	Curriculum Development Team Member	*"Evaluation results serve as a basis for revising GLOs, CLOs, course materials, and instructional strategies to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant."*
Integration of digital technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI)	English Lecturer/Active Student	*"Digital technology and AI need to be utilized in the learning process; however, their use must be accompanied by the ability to verify information, think critically, and observe academic ethics."*

Source: Interviews with the research informants.

Based on the research findings, the integrated curriculum alignment framework of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara comprises five stages: identifying graduate competencies, mapping and aligning the curriculum, implementing learning, evaluating, and continuously improving the curriculum. These five stages connect the institution's vision and mission, KKNI, SN-Dikti, OBE principles, and stakeholder needs with the achievement of academic, professional, and pedagogical competencies, as well as the internalization of Islamic values. Furthermore, the integration of digital technology and AI needs to be strengthened continuously to ensure the curriculum remains relevant to educational developments and labor market requirements.

3.2. Discussion

3.1.1 Alignment of Graduate Competencies in the curriculum

The research results show that the English Education Study Program curriculum at UIN North Sumatra already connects graduate profiles, Learning Outcomes for Graduates (CPL), Course Learning Outcomes (CPMK), materials, learning activities, and assessments. This finding aligns with the concept of constructive alignment proposed by Romlah et al., which argues that curriculum alignment must be built through a consistent relationship among learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments [12]. However, alignment is not enough if it exists only in administrative documents; it must also be reflected in students' learning experiences and competency achievements. Therefore, the connection between CPL, CPMK, and courses at UIN Sumatera Utara must be consistently ensured in practice so it truly supports the development of future English teachers' competencies.

Next, the research results show that graduates' competencies are developed through mastery of linguistic, pedagogical, and professional skills, as well as teaching practice experience, while also considering the needs of schools and the job market. This finding aligns with Alfian et al., who emphasize the importance of involving various stakeholders in developing a curriculum oriented toward graduates' job readiness [13]. The research also found that a mismatch between the curriculum and job requirements can happen when learning focuses too much on theory and pays less attention to practical skills and supporting abilities. Therefore, courses on teaching methodology, instructional material development,

microteaching, and teaching practice in UIN North Sumatra's curriculum are important and need to be strengthened through ongoing involvement from lecturers, students, alums, school principals, and English teachers.

From the perspective of English language teachers, Imadduddin et al. show that ELT curriculum development needs to pay attention to needs analysis, formulation of learning, syllabus preparation, material development, and lesson planning involving the experience and reflection of student teachers [14]. This research aligns with findings at UIN Sumatera Utara, which show that student competence is built through a combination of mastery of language theory, educational science, teaching material preparation, and teaching practice. This similarity indicates that an English education curriculum should not focus only on mastering language content and teaching methods, but should also develop reflective abilities, critical thinking, and awareness of students' needs. Therefore, strengthening practical experience and learning reflection can be an important part of curriculum improvement.

Another area needing attention is the digital competence of prospective English teachers. Rosidah et al. found that prospective English teachers can develop interactive learning media, but they still face challenges such as limited resources, internet connectivity, and access to software [15]. These findings align with research at UIN Sumatera Utara, which showed that digital literacy has begun to appear in learning media courses and technology-assisted learning but has not yet been explicitly formulated as an integrated competency achievement. This indicates that strengthening digital competence must be accompanied by facilities, practical opportunities, and guidance so students can not only use technology but also choose and develop learning media according to learners' needs.

Strengthening digital competence is becoming increasingly important as artificial intelligence develops in English education. Baidowi et al. found that prospective EFL teachers' abilities to use AI-based tools in technological knowledge, pedagogy-technology, content-technology, and TPACK integration remain at a moderate level. The study also highlights the importance of developing these competencies through professional training, collaboration, staying updated on technology information, and hands-on practice with AI tools [16]. These results support research findings at UIN Sumatera Utara that the use of AI needs to be strengthened in developing teaching materials, searching for learning resources, and assessments, while still paying attention to information accuracy and academic ethics. Therefore, AI literacy should not be an extra skill; it should be integrated into learning outcomes, classroom activities, and assessment systems in a guided way.

Overall, the results support the view that alignment in higher education curricula is an ongoing process that involves integrating learning objectives, academic implementation, professional experience, evaluation, and stakeholder needs. The curriculum's structural alignment at UIN Sumatera Utara shows a systematic foundation but still needs strengthening in digital competence, AI utilization, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and professional reflection. Unlike previous studies that focused more on learning alignment, stakeholder involvement, or digital competence separately, this study connects these aspects in evaluating the English language curriculum at Islamic higher education institutions. Thus, curriculum development needs to be directed towards

integrating academic, pedagogical, professional, digital competencies, and Islamic values so that graduates are better prepared to meet the needs of education and changes in the working world.

3.1.2 Conditions That Shape Curriculum Alignment

Research results show that institutional policies play an important role in shaping curriculum alignment in the English Education Study Program at UIN North Sumatra, especially through the integration of academic, professional, and Islamic values. This finding aligns with Zuhriyah et al., who examined the development of Islamic higher education curricula in Indonesia and Malaysia [17]. The study explains that integrating scientific knowledge and Islamic values is necessary to avoid separating knowledge mastery from graduates' character development. This finding is reflected in the curriculum at UIN North Sumatra, which not only guides students in mastering English and teaching skills but also instills ethics, responsibility, and Islamic values. In this way, institutional policies become an important foundation for shaping graduates with professional competence and the character of educators grounded in Islamic values.

Besides institutional policies, implementing KKNI, SN-Dikti, and the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) plays an important role in maintaining the connection between graduate profiles, CPL, CPMK, learning materials, classroom activities, and assessments. This finding aligns with Ramli et al.'s study on constructive alignment, which emphasizes linking learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment [18]. This alignment is needed so that learning objectives are not just listed in the curriculum documents but are actually realized through the learning process. In this research, the connection between CPL, CPMK, and courses shows a systematic effort to apply this principle. However, curriculum alignment still needs to be evaluated based on how learning is carried out and students' competency achievements, not just on the administrative consistency of the documents.

The research results also show that involving stakeholders, like lecturers, students, alums, school principals, and English teachers, is taken into account in developing graduate competencies. This aligns with Muhith et al., which explains that developing a work-ready curriculum requires the involvement of various parties, especially universities and graduate employers [19]. The research also found that weak connections between universities and employers, along with the dominance of theoretical learning, can hinder how well the curriculum matches job-market needs. Findings at UIN North Sumatra show that input from schools and alums experience is needed to ensure graduates have the skills to master the material, manage classrooms, prepare learning tools, and adapt to professional environments. Therefore, involving stakeholders should be done continuously through curriculum evaluations, tracer studies, and graduate user surveys.

From a technology development perspective, research shows that digital technology is increasingly integrated through courses on learning media, teaching methodology, assessment, and teaching practice. However, digital competence has not yet been fully formulated explicitly in all achievements. learning. This finding aligns with research by Adinugrahat et al., which examines the digital competence of prospective English teachers

in developing interactive learning media [20]. The research shows how important it is for future teachers to master various digital tools to support their creativity and skills in designing learning materials. These findings suggest that developing digital competence should not focus only on using apps, but also on choosing, designing, and evaluating learning media based on students' characteristics. So, integrating digital literacy into the curriculum needs to be strengthened through classes that give hands-on practice.

Perkembangan kecerdasan buatan (Artificial Intelligence/AI) juga menjadi faktor yang semakin penting dalam pengembangan kurikulum bagi calon guru bahasa Inggris. Maulana, through research on the technological knowledge of prospective English teachers in Indonesia, found that using AI-based tools requires mastery of technology, pedagogy, and learning content knowledge through the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework [21]. The findings align with research at UIN Sumatera Utara, which shows the need to strengthen students' skills in using AI to develop teaching materials, find learning resources, and support assessment processes. However, using this technology must be paired with the ability to check information accuracy, think critically, and follow academic ethics. Therefore, AI literacy needs to be integrated more intentionally into learning outcomes, course learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment systems so students can use technology critically and responsibly.

Overall, this discussion shows that the curriculum alignment of the English Education Study Program at UIN Sumatera Utara is shaped by institutional policies, higher education standards, the integration of Islamic values, stakeholder involvement, and technological development. The research findings support previous studies on the importance of aligning learning outcomes, developing professional competencies, and integrating technology in higher education. This study contributes by linking these aspects within the context of English education in Islamic universities. Although the curriculum structure shows fairly systematic integration, improvements are still needed, especially in clarifying digital literacy and AI outcomes and strengthening the link between academic learning and professional needs. Therefore, continuous curriculum development is an important step toward producing future English teachers who are competent, adaptive, critical, and grounded in Islamic values.

3.1.3 Difficulty in Keeping the Curriculum Aligned

The research results show that the main challenge in maintaining alignment of the English Education Study Program curriculum at UIN Sumatera Utara stems from changing educational needs, technological developments, and job market demands. Interviews with program coordinators and alums revealed that graduates' competencies are not determined solely by English mastery but also require pedagogical skills, communication, adaptability to technological advancements, and the application of relevant teaching methods. This condition is in line with the research by Khaeroni et al., which explains that the development of higher education curricula needs to involve various stakeholders so that graduates' competencies are more in line with the needs of the workforce [22]. Thus, the curriculum's relevance must be maintained through regular evaluations that account for changes in school

needs, teacher professional development, and feedback from alums and graduates' employers.

In addition to external relevance, the research shows that maintaining continuity in mapping Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL) and Course Learning Outcomes (CPMK) is a challenge in curriculum development. Coordination among lecturers is needed so that each course clearly contributes to graduate competencies, without overlapping content or gaps in certain skills. This relates to the concept of constructive alignment discussed by Diana et al., which highlights the importance of the connection between learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessments [23]. In this research, mapping CPL and CPMK must be applied consistently to materials, learning methods, and assessments. This means curriculum alignment depends not only on the existence of learning outcome documents but also on how well they are integrated into each course.

The next finding shows a challenge in balancing mastery of theory with practical learning experience. Interviews with lecturers, students, principals, and English teachers indicated that mastering language and pedagogical concepts needs to go hand in hand with teaching experience, classroom management, lesson planning, and the ability to adapt methods to students' characteristics. This situation highlights the importance of practical experience as an integral part of teacher education. Dermawan and colleagues emphasize that quality teacher education needs to connect knowledge mastery with guided practical experience, including opportunities to apply, test, and reflect on knowledge in real learning contexts [24]. Therefore, the English Education Study Program curriculum needs to ensure that theory courses, microteaching, and field experience are arranged continuously so students gradually build professional readiness.

Another challenge that was found is the limitation of semester credit units (SKS) in accommodating the various competencies that students need to master. Observations of curriculum documents and interviews with program coordinators showed that the SKS arrangement requires proportional selection of materials, especially to maintain a balance between language, pedagogical, research, teaching practice, and learning technology competencies. This issue relates to the principle of constructive alignment put forward by Sukardi & Usman, which states that learning design needs to be oriented toward essential outcomes and the interconnection between curriculum elements, not just the addition of materials or learning activities [25]. Thus, the credit limitation needs to be addressed by organizing course content, reducing overlapping material, and integrating related competencies into learning activities and assessments.

The development of technology also becomes a challenge that needs to be considered in maintaining curriculum alignment. Interviews with alums and English teachers show that graduates are faced with the need to use digital media, develop teaching materials, and adjust learning strategies with technological development. This finding aligns with research by Selviani et al., who studied the digital competence of prospective English teachers in developing interactive teaching materials [26]. The research shows the importance of digital competence in designing learning materials. Meanwhile, Adinugraha et al. highlight the relevance of English teacher candidates' technology knowledge in using AI-based tools [20]. Both studies reinforce the finding that technology mastery needs to be more deliberately

integrated into the curriculum, not just through the use of digital devices, but also through the ability to choose, evaluate, and use them responsibly to support English learning.

Overall, the research findings indicate that challenges in maintaining curriculum alignment stem from evolving educational and labor-market needs, the continuity between graduate and course learning outcomes, the balance between theoretical and practical components, limitations in semester credit allocations, and growing demands for digital competencies. These findings emphasize that curriculum improvement cannot be achieved solely through revisions to course structures but also requires coordination among lecturers, evaluation of learning outcome attainment, strengthened practical learning experiences, and the involvement of alums and employers. A multi-stakeholder approach, as highlighted in previous studies, can provide a foundation for aligning the academic needs of higher education institutions with the professional demands of schools. Therefore, regular curriculum evaluations should focus on integrating academic, pedagogical, professional, and digital competencies to prepare graduates better to respond to changes in educational practices.

3.1.4 Integrated Curriculum Alignment Framework

The research results show that the curriculum alignment framework of the Integrated English Education Study Program at UIN North Sumatra is built through five stages, namely identifying graduate competencies, mapping and aligning the curriculum, implementing learning, evaluating, and continuously improving the curriculum. The competency identification stage, which refers to the institution's vision and mission, KKNI, SN-Dikti, the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and stakeholder needs, indicates that curriculum development should start with the graduate profile to be achieved. This finding aligns with Nurjunaidah et al., who explain that developing an OBE-based curriculum requires a vertical link between graduate profiles and learning outcomes at the course level, as well as a mechanism for continuous quality improvement [27]. So, identifying competencies is not just an administrative step in designing the curriculum, but a foundation to make sure that all learning components are aimed at achieving academic, pedagogical, professional, and Islamic values competencies.

The next step is mapping and aligning the curriculum by linking Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL), Course Learning Outcomes (CPMK), course materials, learning activities, and the assessment system. Interviews with curriculum development team members showed that each course needs to clearly contribute to achieving graduate competencies. This finding is supported by research from Jufriadi & Wahibah on evaluating OBE alignment in English teacher education, which highlights the importance of traceability between learning outcomes, learning activities, assessments, and evidence of achievement of competencies [28]. The research also found that the connection between curriculum components still needed strengthening, especially in feedback and providing diverse learning opportunities. Therefore, curriculum mapping at UIN Sumatera Utara needs to ensure that CPL and CPMK are not only listed in documents but are also consistently translated into the learning and assessment process of each course.

At the implementation stage, the results showed that the curriculum integrates academic learning with professional practice through discussions, presentations, preparing teaching materials, microteaching, and teaching practice. Interviews with lecturers and students showed that this combination allows students to develop their English proficiency, pedagogical skills, and readiness to face classroom situations. These findings align with Sudjatnika & Paturohmah, who found that teaching practice is an important component of English teacher education because it provides experience to apply theoretical knowledge, develop teaching skills, and reflect on practice [29]. Thus, curriculum implementation should be designed gradually and continuously so students not only master academic concepts but can also apply them in a professional context. Integrating lectures, microteaching, and field practice is an important element in shaping the competence of future English teachers.

The evaluation stage in the integrated curriculum alignment framework is reflected in learning assessments, tracer studies, graduate user surveys, and stakeholder consultations. Interviews with alums, principals, English teachers, and study program managers show that evaluating graduate competencies needs to consider teaching skills, subject mastery, classroom management, discipline, and the ability to adapt to school needs. This aligns with Julianto & Pohan's research, which emphasizes the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach in higher education curriculum development [30]. Involving universities, graduates, and employers can help identify gaps between the skills developed during education and the skills needed in the workplace. Therefore, evaluating the English Education Study Program curriculum should use multiple feedback sources so the assessment of curriculum relevance is based not only on students' academic achievements but also on the needs and experiences of graduates' employers.

Next, the curriculum improvement stage follows the evaluation results to refine the CPL, CPMK, course materials, learning strategies, and assessment system. Interviews with the curriculum development team showed that input from lecturers, alums, schools, and graduates' users is considered when deciding which aspects need updating. These findings support Khoiruddin & Fathoni's view that OBE-based curriculum development requires a continuous quality improvement mechanism that links evaluation results to subsequent corrective actions [31]. This means evaluation should not stop at gathering information or assessing learning achievements; it should lead to actionable decisions in curriculum development. Therefore, the five stages of curriculum alignment in this study form an interconnected cycle, from defining competencies to refining the curriculum based on evidence and stakeholder feedback.

Beyond these five stages, research shows that curriculum development must account for the development of digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI) to support sustainable curriculum development. Interviews with lecturers and students indicate that technology use must be paired with the ability to evaluate information, think critically, and adhere to academic ethics. This finding aligns with research by Farihin et al. on Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, which shows that AI literacy in English teacher education has begun to develop. However, its integration remains somewhat implicit and has not been systematically designed into the curriculum [32]. The study emphasizes the need

to integrate AI literacy explicitly so its use has a pedagogical and ethical foundation. Thus, the integrated curriculum alignment framework of the English Education Study Program at UIN Sumatera Utara needs to position digital and AI competencies as cross-stage elements, from competency identification and course mapping to learning implementation, evaluation, and curriculum improvement. Overall, this framework highlights that curriculum alignment is an ongoing process that integrates educational standards, stakeholder needs, professional competencies, technological developments, and Islamic values.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the English Education Study Program curriculum at UIN Sumatera Utara shows structural alignment among graduate profiles, CPL, CPMK, the learning process, and stakeholder needs through five stages of curriculum development: competency identification, mapping, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. These findings imply the need to strengthen an OBE-based curriculum that integrates academic, pedagogical, and professional competencies, Islamic values, and digital literacy and artificial intelligence (AI). However, this study has limitations because it focuses on only one study program and emphasizes document analysis and informant perceptions, so it does not directly measure graduates' competency mastery or the suitability of these competencies with actual job performance. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more universities. Using a mixed approach, and examining the relationship between curriculum implementation, graduate competency achievements, and the needs of users of graduates to get a more comprehensive picture.

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