

Implementation of the Spiral Curriculum Principle in Akidah and Akhlak Learning to Strengthen Student Character in Islamic Junior High Schools

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received:

27-05-2026

Revised:

16-06-2026

Accepted:

11-08-2026

Keywords

Spiral Curriculum, Faith and Morals, Character Education

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the spiral curriculum principle in Akidah and Akhlak learning and examine its contribution to strengthening student character in Islamic junior high schools. A qualitative approach with a descriptive design was employed. The research was conducted in several Islamic junior high schools in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, involving Akidah and Akhlak teachers, principals, and curriculum developers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, then analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the spiral curriculum principle has been implemented through the progressive organization of learning materials, meaningful repetition of core concepts, contextual integration of Islamic values, and teachers' roles as facilitators of moral and spiritual development. These practices contribute to strengthening students' responsibility, honesty, discipline, and moral awareness. However, implementation remains constrained by the absence of explicit spiral curriculum guidelines, limited teacher training, administrative workload, and insufficient curriculum synchronization across educational levels. The study implies that effective implementation of the spiral curriculum requires systematic curriculum planning, continuous professional development for teachers, and stronger institutional support to ensure sustainable character education based on Islamic values. These findings provide practical guidance for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in improving the quality of Aqidah and Akhlak learning in Islamic schools.

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Introduction

Islamic religious education plays a crucial role in Indonesia in shaping the nation's character based on noble moral principles. In madrasah (Islamic school) settings, the subject of Akidah and Akhlak (Islamic Faith and Morals) serves as a crucial instrument for instilling spiritual and ethical values, ensuring these values are integrated into students' dispositions and actions. Amidst the rise of moral decline, the spread of disinformation, and the rapidly growing instant culture of the digital era, the urgency of strengthening character education rooted in Islamic teachings is increasingly apparent (Fawaz & Azrai, 2021). This situation indicates that moral character formation is inadequate if presented solely through theoretical-dogmatic teaching methods; it requires development through approaches that can foster students' intrinsic awareness and spiritual experiences.

The Akidah and Akhlak subject in Madrasah Tsanawiyah, as an integral element of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, was developed to accompany students in progressively instilling the concept of monotheism and noble character. In the context of the challenges of globalization and the rapid advancement of educational technology, this curriculum is expected to function as a moral shield for the younger generation of Muslims, enabling them to always adhere to Islamic teachings that are moderate and have noble character (Ulya et al., 2025). The results of this study underscore the importance of developing an PAI curriculum framework that is not only theoretical, but also able to respond and adapt to dynamic social changes.

The curriculum structure of Akidah and Akhlak in Islamic Junior High Schools adopts the spiral method. This method means that material is taught repeatedly with increasing depth and complexity from grades 7 to 9 (Darsono et al., 2025). This approach helps students develop a broader conceptual understanding, as each core competency is linked to previous learning experiences. Therefore, the teaching and learning process becomes continuous and integrated, strengthening the relationship between religious knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

However, the implementation of this circular curriculum concept has not yet reached its full potential. A study by Hasanah (2025) revealed that the teaching of Akidah and Akhlak still focuses on memorization and cognitive aspects, with less emphasis on the affective dimension and the formation of noble character. This situation contradicts the essence of the circular curriculum, which prioritizes in-depth and relevant review of material so that the values taught are not only understood but also absorbed and shape the students' consistent personalities.

The discrepancy between ideal curriculum design and the reality of its implementation in the field is further emphasized by the research findings of Rabbani et al. (2024). These findings indicate that the majority of madrasahs still use fragmented methods in developing their Islamic Religious Education curriculum. A comprehensive approach that should integrate students' spiritual, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects has not been implemented optimally. Yet, within the framework of Islamic education, character formation requires comprehensive attention to all dimensions of students' humanity.

The direction of national education policy, as evident in the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum, prioritizes character building and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile as the primary focus of the learning process. However, in practice, the integration of these values into the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum still faces several operational challenges (Sari et al., 2024). Educators often struggle to integrate learning objectives with character building efforts based on faith and obedience, particularly when addressing differences in student characteristics and limited access to digital learning resources specifically presenting Islamic teachings.

Recent research indicates that the use of a learning model focused on the formation of spiritual habits and reflection in a structured and gradual manner has a positive impact on the development of students' spiritual intelligence and moral character (Amelda et al., 2024). This strategy emphasizes a cycle of reinforcing values through repetition and consistency in students' daily lives. The goal is for learning to go beyond simply understanding religious concepts and theories to embodying and internalizing these values in concrete actions.

Theoretically, a comprehensive evaluation of the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum is crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of its conceptual, pedagogical, and spiritual aspects. Wardi et al. (2025) stated that a curriculum design based on the Islamic boarding school system in Indonesia effectively contributes to the preservation of traditional Islamic values while responding to contemporary educational requirements. In this context, the application of the spiral curriculum principle can serve as a strategic tool to revamp the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum to make it more contextually appropriate, adaptable, and relevant to the needs of today's students.

The importance of this research increases when linked to the socio-psychological conditions of Madrasah Tsanawiyah students, who tend to experience identity crises due to the heavy influence of digital culture. Rizal et al. (2023) emphasized that integrating values-based learning with other subjects, including mathematics and science, has proven effective in strengthening students' religious character. These results suggest that values education should be implemented across the curriculum and made a shared obligation across all subjects, not just an assignment in the Akidah and Akhlak (Faith and Morals) subject.

Referring to the situation description previously presented, this review is designed to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum structure at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level. This review includes examining the extent to which the curriculum aligns with the spiral curriculum concept in supporting student character development. Theoretically, this study is expected to broaden academic understanding regarding the design of an Islamic Religious Education curriculum that focuses on holistic and sustainable character formation. Furthermore, practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as theoretical guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and decision-makers to improve the implementation of character education based on Islamic principles in madrasah institutions.

Method

This study employed a qualitative methodology and a holistic descriptive analysis design. This method was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives: to gain a better understanding of how the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum in Islamic Junior High Schools is structured and how the spiral curriculum contributes to student character formation. Creswell & Poth (2018) stated that a qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the meaning of social and educational phenomena contextually. Furthermore, this method allows for the exploration of unquantifiable aspects of morality, values, and

spirituality in Islamic education.

This study was conducted at several Islamic Junior High Schools (MTs) across Pekanbaru City. The locations were randomly selected due to the varying characteristics of the institutions and the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum. The study subjects consisted of Akidah and Akhlak (Islamic Akidah) teachers, principals, and curriculum developers with at least five years of Islamic Religious Education teaching experience. Because the researcher required respondents with in-depth knowledge of curriculum implementation and student character-building procedures, a purposive informant sampling method was used (Rachman et al., 2024).

The data sources in this study are classified as primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained through classroom observations and comprehensive interviews, as well as educational program documentation, such as syllabi, lesson plans, and the Akidah and Akhlak teaching module. Secondary data, on the other hand, include official documents from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the 2013 Curriculum, and the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as a number of scientific literature discussing the spiral curriculum and Islamic character education (Umam & Hamami, 2023). It is hoped that a deeper understanding of the dynamics between learning practices and curriculum design can be gained through the combination of these two data sources.

Three main methods were used to collect data: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. Interviews were conducted to determine the opinions of teachers and madrasah principals regarding the use of the spiral principle in teaching Akidah and Akhlak. In the classroom, observations were conducted to evaluate the application of the principle of meaningful repetition (meaningful repetition) and learning activities that enhance character values. Furthermore, documentation studies were used to evaluate the curriculum materials and evaluation methods used by the educational institution. To ensure high validity of the research results, these three approaches were applied triangulatingly (Fiantika et al., 2022).

To conduct data analysis, the interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2019) uses three stages: data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data were reduced by gathering relevant information from observations and interviews, presented in narrative form and thematic tables, and conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns of relationships between curriculum structure, the application of the spiral principle, and the process of student character formation. Dominant themes such as "integration of values," "meaningful repetition," and "synchronization across curriculum levels" were also identified through the use of thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

Result

The Structure of the Akidah and Akhlak Curriculum at MTs

The document analysis results show that the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum at Pekanbaru Middle School largely follows the 2013 Curriculum guidelines and has been adjusted several times to the Merdeka Curriculum. The curriculum consists of core competencies and basic competencies, which are arranged in stages from grades VII to IX. The relationship between the concepts of faith, worship, and morals is demonstrated in the competency development pattern, which has a spiral characteristic where concepts are introduced at the basic level and deepened at the next level.

Further analysis shows that the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum in grade VII focuses on understanding basic concepts of faith, such as the pillars of faith and the attributes of God, as well as basic morals in daily life, including etiquette toward parents, teachers, and peers. The material is presented in a relatively simple and normative format. The goal is to

provide students with a conceptual and affective foundation. At this point, the focus of learning remains on instilling values through conceptual understanding and role modeling, which are essential requirements for developing competencies at the next level.

The structure of the eighth-grade curriculum demonstrates that previously learned material is deepened and expanded. The concept of faith is no longer limited to introduction; instead, the focus is now on strengthening faith through rational and rational evidence, and its relationship to religious and social behavior. The cultivation of commendable attitudes such as responsibility, honesty, and social awareness is included in morals in social interactions and the media. This pattern follows the spiral principle, where core competencies are structured contextually to strengthen the relationship between religious knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

In ninth grade, the Akidah and Akhlak lesson focuses on internalizing values and building a more self-aware moral awareness. Akidah and akhlak relate to adolescent issues such as social ethics, self-control, and responsibility as members of a Muslim community. Students must not only have a strong understanding of Islamic values, but they must also have the ability to assess, reflect on, and apply them in real-world situations. Therefore, the ninth grade curriculum structure serves as a stage for maturation and character strengthening. This also demonstrates that the spiral principle remains in the design of the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum at Madrasah Tsanawiyah.

Spiral Principles in Learning Moral Creeds

Interviews with Akidah and Akhlak teachers revealed that most teachers intuitively understood the spiral principle, although they had not explicitly referenced Bruner's theory. Teachers noted meaningful repetition and increased depth of material, moving from conceptual knowledge to spiritual and social practice. For example, the principle of honesty taught in seventh grade was repeated in eighth grade in more complex social contexts, such as digital conversations.

Furthermore, Akidah and Akhlak educators stated that the implementation of the spiral principle is often achieved through changes in learning methods, such as the use of case studies, reflective discussions, and attitude-building, in daily school activities. Repetition of values is not only conveyed verbally; it is reinforced through concrete practices, such as the connection between moral material and madrasah regulations, routine religious activities, and the dynamics of student-teacher relationships. This pattern shows that teachers strive to connect curriculum material to students' real lives, so that learning becomes more meaningful.

Furthermore, some educators recognized the need for different pedagogical approaches due to the more complex material being introduced into the classroom. In eighth and ninth grades, teachers began encouraging students to think about themselves, assess their behavior, and relate moral principles to real-life issues such as academic responsibility, social media etiquette, and friendships. This indicates that the focus of learning has shifted from normative understanding to internalizing values. This aligns with the goal of the spiral curriculum to develop sustainable character.

However, teachers acknowledged several challenges in consistently implementing the spiral principle, primarily due to varying student abilities and learning time constraints. The speed of internalization of values is influenced by differences in family background, social environment, and students' digital literacy. This situation prompted teachers to use a differentiated approach informally, even though it was not yet structured in lesson plans. The results indicated that teachers intuitively understood the spiral principle, but they still needed conceptual and systemic support to implement it more effectively and equitably.

Integration of Values

A strong theme of integrating Akidah and Akhlak values into the curriculum structure was identified through thematic analysis. Teachers and principals emphasized the importance of combining theological (faith) and practical (moral) elements in the educational process. Observations showed that learning did not focus solely on memorizing Islamic texts; students also considered ethics and social customs within the madrasah environment.

These findings were reinforced by learning methods that linked faith material to students' real-world situations. Teachers intentionally created learning activities that encouraged students to reflect on the relationship between belief and behavior. Examples of these activities included discussing the impact of faith on honesty, responsibility, and social awareness. This method helped students understand that faith is more than theory; it is the moral foundation for making everyday decisions (Romi et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the madrasah culture demonstrates the integration of religious and moral values, which supports the learning process. Religious-based character-building programs, congregational prayer, and the habit of reciting prayers are ways to implement the values taught in the classroom. Teachers and principals believe that consistency between intracurricular learning and daily activities at the madrasah is crucial for fostering internalization of values. This allows students to achieve consistent learning between theory and practice.

Observations also show that the integration of Akidah and Akhlak fosters collaborative and participatory learning. Students engage in group discussions, role-playing simulations, and simple projects that require the application of moral values in social interactions. Through these experiences, students not only gain a cognitive understanding of values but also develop empathy, responsibility, and moral awareness. These results demonstrate that integrating Akidah and Akhlak values into the curriculum significantly contributes to the broader character development of students.

Meaningful Repetition

Through daily reflection, role models, and congregational worship, teachers employ an iterative approach. Formative assessment strategies measure improvements in student understanding and attitudes over time using the spiral principle. These results support Bruner's (1960) theory, which states that students learn best when they gradually learn the same concepts in new contexts.

The way teachers relate lessons to students' personal lives demonstrates the importance of repetition. Daily reflection enhances understanding of the material and self-evaluation of actions taken, both in and out of school. Through this process, students are taught to recognize the connection between learned values and actual actions. As a result, repetition of the material becomes reflective and transformative rather than mechanical.

The use of exemplary stories, whether from the life of the Prophet, the stories of his companions, or contemporary figures, is also an important tool for enriching the learning context. These stories are presented repeatedly from different perspectives appropriate to the grade level, so students not only memorize the storyline but also gain a deeper understanding of morals. This method helps students internalize moral values because they learn through stories that are close to their emotional and social experiences.

Furthermore, regular congregational worship helps improve grades through collective practice. During this time, teachers can conduct informal formative assessments, such as assessing the consistency of students' attitudes, discipline, and responsibility. These assessments show that students' religious and social attitudes develop over time. This demonstrates that the spiral principle works well in building character gradually. These results reaffirm the relevance of Bruner's (1960) theory, which states that effective learning

occurs when the same concept is presented again in increasingly broader and more meaningful contexts for students.

Synchronization Between Curriculum Levels

Documentation data shows efforts to synchronize the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior high school) and Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior high school) levels, particularly within the learning continuum framework. However, interviews revealed a persistent gap in teachers' understanding of the continuity of material, resulting in a less-than-systematic transfer of values between levels.

The process of creating learning planning documents that consider long-term learning outcomes demonstrates an effort to synchronize the Akidah and Akhlak curriculum across levels. To avoid unnecessary repetition, several madrasahs have attempted to align key themes of akidah and akhlak between Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah, such as strengthening monotheism, social ethics, and moral responsibility. This method demonstrates institutional awareness of the importance of the learning continuum as a foundation for sustainable character development.

However, in-depth interviews revealed that synchronization remains administrative in nature and has not been fully internalized in teachers' pedagogical practices. The significant variation in approaches stems from differing interpretations of the depth of material and learning outcomes across levels. As a result, values that should be deepened at the MA level are sometimes retaught at the introductory level, hindering continuity of learning.

Furthermore, limited coordination and collaboration forums in Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah have negatively impacted the transfer of values between levels. Teachers tend to design learning based on the needs of their respective classes without considering the progression of values and competencies. These results suggest the need for more systematic synchronization mechanisms, such as the creation of shared curriculum maps, cross-level learning communities, and the development of joint educational programs.

Implementation of Character Values

Classroom observations show that student character development is carried out through exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), value reflection, and routine madrasah activities such as self-reflection and *dhuha* prayer. The dominant values developed include responsibility, honesty, and discipline, which align with the goals of Islamic character education.

The teacher's role as a moral role model for students is evident in the application of character values through example. Teachers not only deliver standard lessons but also strive to consistently demonstrate discipline, honesty, and responsibility both inside and outside the classroom. This concept helps students emulate positive behavior, allowing the character-building process to occur naturally in everyday life.

Furthermore, value reflection activities are conducted in a structured manner throughout the learning process and at specific moments, such as after religious services or group assignments. Teachers encourage students to evaluate their demonstrated attitudes and behaviors and relate them to the moral values they have learned. This reflection process helps students develop moral awareness and personal responsibility, as they are guided not only to identify true values but also to understand the rationale and meaning behind their application.

The Role of Teachers as Value Facilitators

Akidah and Akhlak teachers serve as educators who not only impart knowledge to students but also assist them in their faith. By using participatory, reflective, and narrative learning approaches, teachers strengthen emotional and spiritual connections with their

students. The teacher's role as a values facilitator is reflected in their ability to create a safe, dialogical, and spiritually nuanced learning environment. Akidah and Akhlak teachers do not position themselves solely as academic authorities, but rather as mentors who open up discussions, listen to students' experiences, and address their concerns from an Islamic perspective. This approach encourages students to be more open in expressing their views and feelings, allowing for a deeper internalization of values.

Furthermore, the narrative approach used by teachers through inspiring stories and life experiences serves as a useful tool for building emotional connection. Both stories about the struggles of exemplary figures and reflections on students' daily experiences help connect the concept of faith to the real world. Spiritual values are conveyed contextually and humanistically through these stories, making them easier for students to understand and internalize.

Furthermore, activities such as group discussions, role-playing simulations, and values-based projects demonstrate a participatory approach. Rather than being the sole source of knowledge, teachers act as facilitators, providing guidance, feedback, and encouraging critical reflection. The results demonstrate that teachers' role as "murobbi" (leaders) has the ability to build emotional and spiritual connections with their students. Ultimately, this contributes significantly to the success of character formation and the development of students' spirituality.

Barriers to Implementing the Spiral Curriculum

Some teachers stated that there was a lack of clear guidelines for the spiral curriculum and a significant administrative burden. Furthermore, the limitations of spiral-oriented education make it difficult for madrasas to implement the principle of meaningful repetition. In addition to the limited curriculum guidelines that explicitly explain how to implement the spiral curriculum, teachers also face challenges in creating lesson plans that align with these principles. Documents such as teaching modules and assessment tools have not been fully developed to demonstrate consistency of competencies across grade levels. As a result, teachers often rely on intuition and personal experience when creating repetitions of material. This can lead to inconsistencies between classes and madrasahs.

Another identified obstacle is the high administrative burden on teachers, particularly in meeting formal reporting and assessment requirements. This situation limits teachers' opportunities for pedagogical reflection and values-based learning innovation. Interviews revealed that some teachers are more focused on meeting administrative targets than on developing spiral learning strategies that require long-term planning and ongoing evaluation of students' attitudes and character development.

Furthermore, the variation in field practices is exacerbated by limited teacher training aimed at implementing the spiral curriculum. Systematic guidance on learning design, formative assessment, and differentiation based on spiral principles has not been provided to teachers. Consequently, the implementation of significant repetition and deepening of values is uneven, depending on the individual teacher's abilities and the institutional support of the madrasah. These results suggest that the implementation of the spiral curriculum in Akidah and Akhlak learning must be more consistent and effective.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the spiral curriculum principle used to teach Akidah and Akhlak in MTs has generally been implemented, although this has not been explicitly documented in the curriculum documents. The teaching of moral values such as honesty and responsibility, which are taught in increasingly complex contexts from grades VII to IX, shows a pattern of iterative learning and increasing depth of material. This is in accordance with the spiral theory of Sami'in & Rahman (2024), which emphasizes that each concept should be introduced simply and then deepened as students' cognitive

development. This principle strengthens the continuity between cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects in madrasahs.

The integration of Islamic Akidah and Akhlak values is one of the characteristics of the MTs curriculum structure found in this study. Akidah and Akhlak teachers not only emphasize theological aspects but also guide students in applying Islamic values in everyday life. This supports the idea of Mudzakkir et al. (2025) that an ideal Islamic education curriculum must integrate spiritual and moral development in a spiral design so that Islamic values are not only understood but also gradually internalized.

Values are embedded contextually through meaningful repetition patterns within the MT spiral curriculum. For example, teaching honesty is linked to everyday behaviors, such as following a schedule. It is also linked to academic honesty during exams. This supports the idea of knowing, feeling, and acting, proposed by Lee et al. (2023), who stated that students develop character when they understand values, feel their meaning, and apply them in real life.

Observations also show that teachers act as spiritual guides, shaping students' personalities through exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*). Teachers not only teach theory but also demonstrate attitudes and behaviors consistent with the values they teach. This finding aligns with research by Rahima et al. (2024), which asserts that the effectiveness of Islamic character education is highly dependent on the teacher's personality and their reflective interactions with students.

In terms of curriculum continuity, it was found that Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah are striving for synchronization. However, practices remain inconsistent. Some teachers repeat material without understanding the vertical relationships between curriculum levels. This condition supports research by Fauziah & Rozi (2025), which states that a lack of coordination between educators is a major obstacle to the implementation of a progressive and spiraling Islamic Religious Education curriculum.

The findings also demonstrate the relevance of the spiral principle to the developmental characteristics of adolescents at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior high) level. Students at this stage require learning that is not only conceptual, but also applicable and reflective. Teachers who are able to connect religious values with modern social contexts, such as the use of digital media, demonstrate stronger character learning outcomes. This aligns with the research findings of Akhyar et al. (2025), which emphasizes the importance of recontextualizing Islamic values in the digital era to ensure character education remains relevant and contextual.

When students learn about Akidah and Akhlak (Islamic creed), elements of value reflection, such as self-reflection activities and discussions about moral meaning, are crucial for developing their spiritual awareness. Mayasari (2025) transformational learning theory states that in-depth reflection on experiences and values enables moral behavior to change. In an Islamic context, this thinking fosters awareness of monotheism and noble morals as valuable lessons.

Triangulative analysis of interviews, observations, and documents indicates that the validity of the spiral curriculum can be seen from the consistency between learning design, classroom practices, and student character outcomes. This model has the advantage of allowing teachers to adjust the depth of material to meet student needs, aligning with Irmawati (2024) view that curriculum flexibility is key to effective Islamic Religious Education learning in madrasahs.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the application of the spiral curriculum principle in the learning of Aqidah Akhlak in Madrasah Tsanawiyah has been

able to support the strengthening of students' character through meaningful repetition of materials, gradual deepening of concepts, integration of *aqidah* and moral values in the learning process, and teacher role models as value facilitators. The research findings indicate that the curriculum structure has accommodated the spiral principle through increasing material complexity from grades VII to IX, which contributes to the development of students' character of responsibility, honesty, discipline, and moral awareness. However, the implementation of this principle has not been optimal due to limitations such as the absence of systematic implementation guidelines, the high administrative burden on teachers, limited training on the spiral curriculum, and the suboptimal synchronization of the curriculum between levels of education. The implications of this research confirm that the implementation of the spiral curriculum can be an effective strategy in strengthening character education based on Islamic values if supported by a sustainable curriculum design, teacher pedagogical competence, and a conducive *madrasah* culture. This research is limited to several *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* in Pekanbaru City with a qualitative approach so that the results cannot be generalized widely. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve a wider area of coverage, use a mixed methods or quantitative approach to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of the spiral curriculum, and develop a more systematic implementation model and learning guide to support the continuous strengthening of students' character.

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