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Multi-faith partner programme through family project: navigating students with the *Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin* curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The family project programme was developed in response to the Indonesian government's programme on the mainstreaming of religious moderation. Although this programme has been running and many studies have been conducted on its success, there is not much research that attempts to examine how family closeness and relational conflicts can affect tolerance actions, as well as exploring the implementation of family projects. The purpose of this research emphasises how students' experiences in family projects can shape perceptions and tolerant practices with peers. This research uses a mixed-methods approach involving a survey method with 275 students, focussing on first-year students, with the aim of obtaining significant and comprehensive insights. The results of this study indicate that family emotional relationships significantly contribute to tolerance actions, but tolerance actions can be influenced by external factors, such as social interactions. Exploratory research with a qualitative approach provides more detailed information, where students prefer to listen to others' views rather than share their own beliefs. Highlighting this finding, students perceive the family programme as a safe and comfortable space for them to share their beliefs, especially if the programme needs to be conducted over a long period and with a high frequency of social interaction.

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Introduction

Acts of intolerance have increased in various countries around the world (Fosnacht and Broderick 2020). The report notes that religiously motivated hostilities are increasing in several regions or developing countries, one of which is Indonesia (Pew Research Center 2014). The focus of this research is on students in Indonesia, which represents an

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interesting case, as they live in a country with religious and cultural diversity, a Muslim majority and a relatively young history of democracy (Geri 2018). However, students have specifically made a significant contribution to the increase in intolerance and radicalism.

Several reports have sparked discussions among educators and raised significant concerns about how students navigate interfaith relations in Indonesia. The latest research report shows that students have a narrow understanding of religious terms (Hanafi et al. 2022). In other words, there is an increase in religious conservatism among students who are seen as agents of the Islamic revival (Parker and Nilan 2013). On the other hand, existing reports are also heavily reliant on quantitative data about student perceptions, and very few reveal how students confronted with religious differences navigate themselves in their daily lives. Furthermore, current research only focusses on understanding religion without a high level of awareness regarding the importance of understanding students' actual experiences in practicing their religion and their daily religious practices (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008).

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need to observe acts of citizenship and religion in society (Kallio, Håkli, and Bäcklund 2015; Wood 2014), but have not yet taken into account the life experiences of students as young people and citizens in their efforts to navigate themselves in religious diversity. The proposed solution in this research is how to explore 'religious citizenship' as a theoretical lens for studying among students. This includes how to integrate, enrich and develop a broader and more dynamic understanding of students' religious identity and citizenship that depends on environmental negotiation (Smith et al. 2005). For example, contextual factors such as culture and their transitional period in youth may limit their perception in the broader society (Harris 2015; Wood 2017).

Thus, the aim of this research is to examine the experiences and explore the daily practices of students in Indonesia regarding living in religious diversity (Nyhagen 2015). More specifically, this research involves examining the civic actions of students and how religion shapes their civic actions in accordance with religious demands. Key aspects of this research are:

- (1) examining how family closeness and relational conflicts can influence tolerance actions
- (2) exploring the application of family projects as representations of religion and citizenship in the micro-campus context.

We believe that considering how students' experiences in family projects can shape perceptions and tolerant practices with peers.

Internalisation of religious moderation in the microcampus context

From a general perspective, religious moderation means prioritising balance in terms of beliefs, morals, discourse and actions as expressions of individual or group religiosity. Religious attitudes and behaviours based on these values of balance are consistently implemented in the form of recognising and understanding individuals or groups that are different. Religious moderation is manifested in tolerant attitudes, respecting

differing opinions, appreciating diversity and not imposing one's will in the name of a particular religious doctrine aggressively (Azis et al. 2019). Religious moderation in classical Islamic studies is known by the term 'wasathiyah'. Wasathiyah emphasises the importance of justice and balance, as well as the middle path, to avoid being trapped in extreme and radical religious attitudes.

In principle, Islamic teachings are characterised by moderation (wasathiyah), both in aspects of faith, worship, ethics and social interactions (Hanafi et al. 2019). Extreme religious character is usually accompanied by the following attitudes. *First*, fanaticism towards one understanding and difficulty in accepting other differing views. *Second*, harbouring ill thoughts towards others because they feel they are the most correct. *Third*, considering others who do not share the same views as misguided or even ignorant (Hanafi et al. 2020). Indicators of religious moderation, with principles of the middle path, balance, justice, tolerance and equality, can be observed and measured in the acceptance of individuals and groups towards national culture and state ideology. The moderate attitudes and behaviours of Indonesian Muslims in practicing their religion necessitate their acceptance of the state by prioritising harmonious living, both during religious disagreements within the same faith community and with followers of different religions. This model of religiosity prioritises a spirit of tolerance for the advancement of the nation and state, based on the spirit of diversity (Hanafi 2019).

It is an inevitability to internalise and implement the values of religious moderation through the world of education. Islamic education should not be solely orientated towards theoretical religious issues that are purely cognitive-academic in nature. In fact, greater attention should be focused on how to transform religious knowledge into moderate and tolerant religious attitudes and behaviours. The mainstreaming of religious moderation in the non-religious campus environment indeed requires more attention considering the complexity of the situation and more complicated conditions. The cause is the generally low religious literacy among students, where religious insights and understanding are mostly obtained through formal religious education courses in class (Azis et al. 2019).

The family project in the Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin curriculum

Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin (to you your religion and to me my religion) is a multi-faith curriculum that will be implemented in the family project. This curriculum aims to enable students to learn about various beliefs objectively. Specifically, this curriculum can expose students to a diversity of religious and non-religious views, but it does not impose any particular view, nor does it convert students to any specific religion. It is hoped that with this curriculum, religious education can be delivered more accurately without neglecting the role of family and peers. This curriculum aspires to appreciate and respect all religious views and to be fair to all students, regardless of their religious backgrounds.

The family project in the *Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin* curriculum is supported by a constructivist and dialogic approach to religious education. This project encourages students to share their religious experiences with each other, thereby prompting them to engage in conversations with their families at home and peers on campus. In other words, students can bring their beliefs from the private space of home to the public space of school. This project is also built on a positive attitude towards the diversity

of backgrounds (Jackson 2006), and lecturers must be able to create a safe space for students to express their beliefs and respect the beliefs of other students (Jackson 2014). In short, this family project is supported by social factors from family, peers, lecturers and the campus (Hemming and Madge 2012). Students build knowledge from information received in the family, school environment (especially religious education) and their classmates (Faas, Smith, and Darmody 2018) so that it can support mental health independence (especially intuitive health). A family project steps framework – spanning individual reflection, family interviews, structured peer dialogue, instructor scaffolding, campus-wide poster sharing and personal journaling – is illustrated through concrete examples of discussing interfaith marriage in Table 1.

The family project programme targets minority tolerance. Each group has at least one non-Muslim student. Each of the six stages (Table 1) integrates material from minority religious traditions to ensure meaningful exposure to religious diversity. For example, in Stage 3, students discuss interfaith marriage without agreeing with Islamic opinions. They explain their religious teachings and listen respectfully to minority students' perspectives. This approach helps students express their faith confidently while respecting religious differences, especially minority religions. The family project supports tolerance towards minority groups without compromising students' religious commitments.

Method

This article aims to investigate the experiences and perspectives of students regarding family projects in the *Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin* curriculum at two campuses located in urban areas of Indonesia. The reason for the selection is that both campuses have programmes aligned with the principles of the *Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin* curriculum, and their students possess good knowledge and practice of family projects that they undertake during their first year in pursuing an undergraduate degree. For reference, Malone, O'Toole, and Mullally (2021) define 'family project' as a learning method used with groups that encourages students from different religious backgrounds to engage in conversations with their families and peers about current themes or issues related to religious moderation. In addition, both campuses are also multicultural universities with students from diverse religious, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The family project was developed and implemented by the study programme at a predominantly Muslim university (approximately 90% Muslim enrolment), where students may have limited exposure to minority religious practices. This project included activities and discussions intended to foster tolerance and understanding, including exposure to case examples from Christians and Catholics traditions.

The design of this research uses a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell 2012), which consists of questionnaires and focus group discussions. As done by Malone, O'Toole, and Mullally (2021), this mixed-methods approach was chosen to deepen knowledge about the topic of this family project, but in the context of students. As a result, we can draw stronger and broader conclusions about the students' national outlook and religious identity (Hemming and Madge 2012).

Table 1. A family project steps framework.

Syntax Step	Technique (Example: Interfaith Marriage Discussion)	What Happens & Why
Activate Prior Knowledge (Constructivist Entry)	Individual Written Reflection Students write down their own religious teachings about interfaith marriage. <i>Example:</i> Ahmad (Muslim) notes that Islam prohibits marriage to non-Muslim women; Lina (Catholic) records that Catholic doctrine permits interfaith marriage under certain conditions. They see up front that their starting points differ.	Learners surface their baseline beliefs without external influence.
Family Boundary-Crossing (Between Home and School)	Mini-Family Interview Students ask a family member: “What is our family’s view on interfaith marriage?” <i>Example:</i> Ahmad recounts his father’s past refusal of a relative’s interfaith wedding; Lina shares that her family values tolerance while maintaining religious identity. These narratives add depth without pressuring change.	Real-world family perspectives enrich the discussion.
Dialogic Peer Exchange (Safe Small-Group Talk)	Structured “I Understand, I’m Not Debating” Dialogue Rules: listen actively, confirm understanding, no arguing or judging. <i>Example:</i> Ahmad explains the Islamic rationale for preserving family faith; Lina describes the Catholic process for dispensation. Peers ask clarifying questions (e.g. “Do children then follow one faith?”) but do so respectfully.	Students practice empathetic listening rather than persuasion.
Lecturer-Facilitated Scaffolding (Dialogic Support)	Reinforcement of Purpose The lecturer reiterates: “Our goal is to understand each other’s views, not to agree or convert”. <i>Example:</i> The instructor cites <i>Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin</i> (“To you your religion, to me mine”) to underscore mutual respect amidst differing religious laws.	Creates a psychologically safe space—no one feels pressured to change beliefs.
Campus-Wide Sharing (Student-Led Poster Carousel)	Narrative Poster Exhibition Groups create posters: 1) “My Religion’s View on Interfaith Marriage” 2) “How I Respect Friends of Other Faiths”. Posters are displayed and peers leave comments. <i>Example:</i> Ahmad’s poster reads, “Islam preserves faith integrity; I honor my friends’ convictions”. Lina’s says, “My church upholds love and respect; I honor my Muslim friends’ principles”.	Highlights each faith’s stance respectfully, encourages campus-wide empathy.
Reflective Journaling (Metacognitive Consolidation)	Guided Journal Prompts Students answer: “What deeper insight did I gain about another faith’s view?” <i>Example:</i> Ahmad writes that he now appreciates why the Church allows dispensation in certain cases; Lina notes newfound respect for Islam’s emphasis on safeguarding family faith.	Personalizes and cements understanding of difference as normal, not threatening.

Survey

The survey in the form of a questionnaire was distributed to students who acted as a group of experts (Denscombe 2021) in terms of the latest information related to the family project. The questionnaire only collects quantitative data to explain the correlation between family emotional relationships and tolerance actions. This study involved 275 first-year students who had experience participating in the family project programme, returned the consent forms as participants, and fully responded to the questionnaire.

The independent variable in this study is the emotional relationship within the family. The instrument used and the provided answer choices refer to Dollahite et al. (2023). An example of the item is 'I feel comfortable talking about personal issues with my family', while the dependent variable in this study is the action of tolerance in the context of campus religiosity and spirituality. An example item is 'How often do you try to understand the perspective of other religions in discussions or debates?' Both variables in this study are composite variables, as they are formed from the combination or amalgamation of several simpler indicators or variables. Additionally, we also take into account simple variables related to the frequency of interactions with people from different religious backgrounds. Finally, several demographic variables are also considered independent variables, including gender, age, study programme, socioeconomic background and place of residence.

Each returned questionnaire is assigned a number starting with S1 (for the first student) and ending with S275. Students were asked to write their religion or belief system at the beginning of the questionnaire, where the majority were Muslims, totalling 258 students, followed by Christians and Catholics, each with 8 students, and only 1 student identified as Hindu. We used linear regression analysis to determine the total contribution of all the considered variables to tolerance actions. Additionally, this analysis can provide detailed information about which variables are significant and how they relate to the dependent variable.

Focus group

We chose focus groups for several important reasons. *First*, focus groups are more time-efficient because they allow data to be collected from multiple participants at the same time. *Second*, participants will feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and knowledge (Robson 2024). *Third*, this data collection method provides the advantage where participants can elaborate in more detail through discussion (Bell 2005). In line with this reason, Hill (2005) also revealed that focus groups can guide participants to elaborate on unplanned topics. Additionally, diverse backgrounds can encourage participants to provide various perspectives regarding their attitudes towards family projects.

We involved at least three focus groups from each campus participating in this research, resulting in six focus groups. We only invite students who have participated in the family project. Thus, the technique we used is opportunity sampling (Greig, Taylor, and MacKay 2007). We ask the family project supervising lecturers to send three to four students to each class with the criteria of having in-depth experience with family projects and the ability to express opinions clearly and straightforwardly, while still considering gender composition. Thus, this research was conducted on a small scale, involving around 20 students (10 females and 10 males) in a focus group discussion lasting approximately 60 min.

During the transcription, we labelled the students from GP1 to GP20. The qualitative data collected from these open-ended responses were analysed and categorised into general themes, which include the experience of listening to others' beliefs, sharing one's own beliefs and the safety and support in sharing beliefs.

Results and discussion

In line with the explanation from Huber et al. (2014) about intercultural learning, the results of this research provide an overview that the family project in the *Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin* curriculum can offer students the opportunity to develop attitudes and understanding competencies applied through actions to share perspectives with each other. The impact is that students can understand and respect people with different beliefs and religions (Malone, O’Toole, and Mullally 2021). We believe that student involvement in this interfaith dialogue enhances respect for diversity and religious tolerance on campus as the embryo of society.

Quantitative

Analysis using linear regression shows that there is a moderate strength of relationship between the predictor (demographic factors and emotional relationships) and the dependent variable (tolerance actions) with an R of 0.410. In other words, 16.8% of the variability in tolerance is explained by the predictor variables used. Although these results do not show high variability, they still indicate a contribution from the predictor variable. The adjusted R² result also still shows that the predictor has a moderate influence, namely 0.143.

Additionally, the F value = 6.738, $p < 0.001$, indicates that the regression model as a whole is significant. In other words, the predictor variable has a significant influence on tolerance. However, if we look at the coefficient values of each predictor showing age ($p = 0.473$), gender ($p = 0.847$), study programme ($p = 0.115$), socioeconomic status ($p = 0.744$), multicultural environment ($p = 0.391$) and place of residence ($p = 0.861$), there is no significant contribution to tolerance. Meanwhile, the frequency of interaction shows a significant and negative effect on tolerance ($B = -2.219$, $p < 0.001$). This means that higher interaction can actually decrease the level of tolerance. On the other hand, emotional ties with family have a positive and significant influence on tolerance ($B = 0.178$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the stronger the emotional ties with family, the higher the level of tolerance. The coefficient values of the overall model are presented in Table 2. Given these quantitative results, it can be argued that students who feel more secure in their family relationships are also more open to students of different religions. This positive relationship between family relationships and tolerance can be understood

Table 2. Overall model coefficient values for tolerance actions.

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	34.576	2.580		13.403	<.001
	Age	−.836	1.164	−.042	−.718	.473
	Gender	−.130	.672	−.011	−.193	.847
	Study programme	.562	.355	.090	1.583	.115
	Socioeconomics	.189	.579	.019	.327	.744
	Multicultural	.652	.760	.049	.858	.391
	Residence	−.116	.664	−.010	−.175	.861
	Interaction	−2.219	.500	−.257	−4.439	<.001
	Relationship	.178	.037	.270	4.766	<.001

^aDependent Variable: Tolerance

through attachment theory, which proposes that secure family relationships create a 'secure base' in which individuals can safely explore social diversity (Bowlby 1969). Although Bowlby did not directly address 'social diversity' (he focused on the infant-caregiver relationship), an interpretation of this theory can expand the concept of a secure base to encompass how individuals feel comfortable interacting amidst differences. Meanwhile, in their Social Identity Theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) explain that individuals strive to achieve and maintain a positive social identity. In other words, if someone feels secure and positive in their group membership, they are less defensive and less hostile towards outgroups.

Qualitative

Strengthening the quantitative results that show a negative interaction affecting tolerance, we further explored how external factors such as approaches involving interpersonal relationships (social interactions) are not relevant compared to family relationships. To achieve this goal, we asked about the students' feelings regarding the family project that required them to listen to and present perspectives from their respective beliefs. The results show a unique pattern, where students prefer (positively) listening rather than presenting (ambivalently) and they question the safety and support of this activity, especially if done repeatedly (negative).

Listening to other people's beliefs (positive)

Of all the focus groups involved, the majority conveyed that the activity of listening to family projects with classmates is a comfortable, enjoyable and engaging activity. This is exemplified by a comment from one of the GP2 members, 'listening to family projects from different beliefs is comfortable and enjoyable for me'. Other comments include: 'What my friends from different backgrounds, including religion, shared provided explanations I might never have imagined before, and that interests me', said one of the GP3 members.

The students realised that listening to the religious views of teammates from different religions and beliefs provides an understanding of different perspectives. 'Listening to my friend's religious views helps me understand them from a different perspective, which might strengthen our relationship because now I know what could hurt their feelings', said GP1. Another comment was, 'Listening to different views is an experience that can actually make friendships stronger. You know what to say to them and what to hide in conversations with them', said GP4.

Students feel that they learn a lot from the experience of living with classmates who have different religions and beliefs during this programme. One of the students in GP1 said, 'I learnt about their life experiences, especially those with minority religions, living among the Muslim majority like me'. However, they feel that discussing religious beliefs with those of different faiths does not enrich their religious understanding. Some students in GP2 and GP3 gave almost the same response: 'Even though I have a religious understanding that I believe is true, I also do not blame their different religious teachings, so this programme is not aimed at providing a deeper understanding of my own religion'. Students at GP4 also said, 'Whatever they say, I don't believe all of it. However, it is also important to understand that

these are differences; just respect what is different between us, even if it can be a bit annoying if it keeps repeating’.

From these results, we can emphasise that listening to other beliefs directly from insiders is more relevant and can enhance multiperspective skills and strengthen friendships (Barnes 2014). This skill is related to students’ ability to consider other people’s perspectives (Huber et al. 2014). In fact, students are able to relate to their own beliefs, especially in terms of universal goodness (Malone, O’Toole, and Mullally 2021). Regarding friendship, students have brought their knowledge from previous educational levels and family to school to strengthen friendships (González, Moll, and Amanti 2005). In general, this family project programme can be said to enhance students’ understanding of other religions and strengthen interfaith friendships (Faas, Darmody, and Sokolowska 2016).

Telling about one’s self-belief (ambivalent)

Some students expressed that they are comfortable sharing their own religious beliefs in their project presentations. GP3 commented, ‘I feel quite comfortable being given the opportunity to talk about what I believe. It seems there is no problem because sharing like this is the hope of this programme, of course within reasonable limits’. A comment from one of the GP1 also conveyed a similar sentiment: ‘Sharing beliefs should be a normal thing; we are not trying to force anything; we just want to provide understanding of what is different from us, which is also important in enhancing pride in our religion’. Various statements reinforce previous research findings that sharing beliefs with others from different religious backgrounds can be associated with recognition from people, which can impact the increase in their self-esteem (Devine 2013; Malone, O’Toole, and Mullally 2021).

Although the positive response is felt by the students, on the other hand, they also experience things they do not like. In one of the focus groups, GP4 stated, ‘I feel awkward when I have to talk about my religious beliefs, especially in front of team members who have diverse beliefs’. GP2 also mentioned, ‘I hesitate to share my beliefs, fearing that I might provide incorrect information. Moreover, I don’t really understand religion well, just the basics. This will certainly be a problem’. Additionally, GP1 also provided a statement, ‘I’m afraid that what I say might be wrong, someone might be offended, or even turn against me because of this’.

On the other hand, they also expressed other negative (ambivalent) feelings related to the experience of having to share beliefs. One of the GP3 members expressed, ‘I feel embarrassed, not good at speaking in public’. ‘I feel more comfortable talking about my religious beliefs in a small group’. Furthermore, they also stated that they need support from their teammates: ‘What I worry about is their response when they listen. If there is reinforcement from them that what I am conveying is safe and beneficial, I will be very confident’. Previous research also yielded the same result: students do not feel comfortable enough to share their beliefs (Moulin 2011). Strengthened by recent research, the main factor causing this is their lack of understanding of religion (Malone, O’Toole, and Mullally 2021).

Security and support in sharing beliefs (negative)

All students in the focus group emphasised that if the family project is implemented for a long period, the study programme should provide a comfortable space for students to share their beliefs (Jackson 2014). FG1 commented, 'My friends and I are thinking that if this continues for a long period, will I feel disturbed by always being given perspectives from other religions, or perhaps the opposite?' 'I feel uncomfortable sharing my opinions and views about my religion'. Meanwhile, FG2 said, 'If the interaction in sharing beliefs happens repeatedly, I'm not sure they will continue to respect my beliefs as they did in the first interaction; someone might get offended'. Furthermore, FG3 also expressed the same concern: 'I feel that repeated interactions strengthen friendships among us, both those of the same religion and different religions, but this has the potential to become an unsafe space where hostility can arise from excess'. In this explanation, the students have actually realised that this learning has the potential for conflict when interfaith dialogue is applied. In addressing this matter, students prefer to avoid conflicts that may arise if dialogues are held too frequently.

Conclusion, implications and limitations

In this study, we introduced a novel family-project programme within the *Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin* curriculum and demonstrated, through a mixed-methods design, its potential to foster deeper emotional bonds among students' families and, critically, to translate those bonds into tangible tolerance-building actions within the microcampus environment. Quantitatively, higher family emotional-tie scores were associated with greater tolerance ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$), and qualitatively, students reported feeling safe to engage in open dialogue and learn from one another. Additionally, we uncovered that sharing deeply personal beliefs can be uncomfortable when done excessively or in public settings.

This unique pattern underscores the complexities that need to be considered when implementing family projects at the university level. Several factors should be taken into account when designing and executing family projects at the university level:

- (1) conduct family projects in small, consistent discussion groups to ensure intimate and controlled interactions.
- (2) refrain from public dissemination (e.g. social media posts) of students' private reflections to prevent misunderstandings and potential harm.
- (3) explore alternative formats, such as poster presentations or guided dialogues with invited religious leaders, to maintain the safety and comfort of all participants.
- (4) monitor minority students closely to ensure that they do not feel marginalised or unfairly labelled.

Our findings are limited to the perspectives of first-year biology students at two campuses. Future research should include second- and fourth-year cohorts, as well as parents, faculty and administrators, to explore how family-project experiences evolve over time and impact broader programme design. Despite these limitations, our findings provide compelling evidence that family-centred pedagogy, grounded in the principles of *Lakum Dinukum Waliyadin*, can effectively bridge the gap between personal faith and open interfaith

dialogue. By creating a structured yet intimate space for sharing beliefs, the model not only mitigates the discomfort of public disclosure but actively transforms it into empathy and mutual respect. We anticipate that this framework will inspire educators and curriculum developers to adapt family-engagement strategies across diverse cultural and disciplinary contexts, fostering sustained tolerance and community cohesion beyond the classroom setting.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Public interest statement

The exploration of this research delineates activities tailored to empower religious communication and address prevalent apprehensions within religious education courses. The Team-based project learning encompasses activities strategically interspersed throughout the academic term, including formulating questions, orchestrating interviews and curating video presentations. Relevant to the universal design for learning, these undertakings are meticulously designated to amplify student engagement, fostering collaborative endeavours and facilitating authentic interviews.

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