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From Curriculum Reform to Enactment: A Bibliometric Analysis of Global Curriculum Implementation Capacity

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Abstract

Curriculum reform is a recurrent policy instrument, but formal change is enacted unevenly across schools and classrooms. This study aims to map the growth, conceptual structure, and thematic evolution of global scholarship linking curriculum reform, implementation, enactment, and teacher agency, and to derive an integrative construct of curriculum implementation capacity. We analysed 641 English-language journal articles and reviews indexed in Scopus from 2000 to July 2026 using Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny. Performance analysis was combined with author-keyword co-occurrence, thematic mapping, correspondence analysis, hierarchical clustering, and trend-topic analysis. The corpus grew by 11.93% annually, involved 1,496 authors across 334 sources, and shifted from institutionally oriented reform discourse toward practice-sensitive work on teacher agency, professional development, policy enactment, curriculum enactment, and assessment coherence. Synthesising the network, thematic, and temporal patterns identified six interdependent dimensions: professional agency, institutional support, collaborative learning, curriculum-assessment alignment, material and policy infrastructure, and contextual responsiveness and feedback. The study concludes that curriculum reform is best governed as a multi-level learning process in which local adaptation is supported, monitored, and aligned with shared educational purposes.

Keywords

Bibliometric Analysis; Curriculum Enactment; Curriculum Reform; Implementation Capacity; Teacher Agency

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1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform is a recurring instrument through which education systems respond to technological change, labour-market expectations, social diversity, and changing conceptions of worthwhile knowledge. Contemporary reforms commonly emphasise competence, flexibility, interdisciplinary learning, digital literacy, character formation, and learner autonomy. Yet reform is not simply the replacement of curriculum content. It is a political, institutional, and pedagogical process that reorganises valued knowledge, teaching, assessment, professional responsibility, and the learner identities an education system seeks to cultivate. Studied by Taliak et al., (2022) and Haliwigena et al., (2024) underscore these ambitions, demonstrating how competency-based secondary education and

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innovative curriculum reforms can foster learner autonomy while equipping students with the competencies required to navigate the demands of Society 5.0..

Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) makes the implementation problem especially visible because greater curricular flexibility is expected to coexist with national educational aims, differentiated learning, and system accountability. Indonesian studies report that implementation is mediated by teacher readiness, facilities, institutional support, sustained assistance, structured planning, stakeholder participation, and continuous evaluation (Mumtahanah et al., 2026; Nihayah et al., 2023; Supriyanti et al., 2025; Tjandra, 2024). These conditions are not uniquely Indonesian. They provide a concrete entry point to a broader international question: why do formally similar reform ambitions produce different patterns of classroom enactment across systems, institutions, and professional settings?

Implementation research has long shown that policy design does not determine practice by itself. Spillane et al. (2002) conceptualise implementation as sense-making in which actors interpret policy through existing knowledge, beliefs, and social interaction. Remillard (2005) similarly shows that curriculum materials acquire meaning through teacher-curriculum interaction rather than direct delivery. Enactment perspectives therefore reject the assumption that teachers transmit stable policy texts without interpretation. Teachers select, combine, modify, sequence, and sometimes resist curricular expectations while working with particular learners and constraints. Recent studies demonstrate that curriculum agency is shaped by standards, professional identity, accountability, organisational arrangements, material resources, and spaces for judgement (Alvunger, 2018; Bergh & Wahlström, 2018; Harris & Graham, 2019; Narayanan et al., 2024; Tao & Gao, 2017).

The ecological account of teacher agency treats agency as an achievement emerging from professional histories, future purposes, and present cultural and material conditions (Priestley et al., 2015). Studies across varied national settings show that agency expands through participation, sustained professional learning, supportive leadership, dialogue, and deliberate adaptation, but is constrained by workload, accountability, centralised decision making, and limited resources (Dinh & Sannino, 2024; Kneen et al., 2023; Nalbantoğlu & Bümen, 2024; Ogwang, 2023; Scanlon et al., 2021; Yakavets et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Policy-enactment studies likewise show that actors translate reform through local artefacts, routines, and disciplinary traditions rather than simply receiving directives (Lambert et al., 2021; Lambert & Penney, 2020; McCloat & Caraher, 2020).

Despite this rich scholarship, the intellectual relationships among curriculum reform, teacher agency, professional learning, policy enactment, curriculum enactment, assessment alignment, and organisational support remain fragmented. Studies are frequently organised around one national reform, school sector, discipline, or professional-development programme. Context-rich studies explain local mechanisms but do not by themselves show how the global knowledge base has developed, which concepts bridge policy and practice, or whether research has shifted from reform prescription toward enactment and implementation capacity. Terminological overlap further complicates synthesis because related processes are described as curriculum change, implementation, enactment, innovation, translation, mediation, adaptation, or educational reform.

Bibliometric science mapping can address this structural problem by combining performance indicators with relational analyses of concepts and thematic development (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020; Mukherjee et al., 2022). Several studies in the journal Qalamuna have also used a bibliometric approach to map teacher competence, character education, and inclusive-education research (Huda et al., 2024; Kurniati et al., 2025; Sitorus, 2022), but no comparable synthesis has integrated the global literature connecting curriculum reform, implementation, enactment, teacher agency, professional learning, and system coherence.

This study maps global research from 2000 to July 2026 and asks: (1) How has volume and citation visibility developed? (2) Which sources and concepts are prominent? (3) What clusters structure the

field? (4) How have themes shifted toward enactment and implementation? and (5) What theoretical and practical agenda follows? Its novelty lies in using convergent co-word, thematic, conceptual, and temporal patterns to derive curriculum implementation capacity: the collective, multi-level ability of teachers, schools, and systems to interpret reform, mobilise resources, align curriculum and assessment, learn from implementation, and sustain contextually defensible change. The construct therefore connects micro-level agency, meso-level organisational conditions, and macro-level policy infrastructure.

2. METHODS

The study employed bibliometric performance analysis and science mapping to examine the development and conceptual organisation of curriculum reform, curriculum implementation, and curriculum enactment research. Performance analysis described publication growth, sources, authorship, and citation visibility, whereas science mapping examined relationships among concepts and their evolution over time. The combined design follows guidance that distinguishes descriptive indicators from relational techniques and encourages bibliometric studies to connect mapped structures with theory development (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Mukherjee et al., 2022).

Bibliographic records were retrieved from Scopus in July 2026 because Scopus provides structured metadata and broad international coverage across education, social science, policy, and professional fields. The period 2000-2026 was selected to capture a comparable twenty-first-century reform era in which standards-, competency-, and agency-oriented curriculum research became increasingly visible, while providing a sufficiently long window for thematic evolution. The year 2026 is explicitly treated as a partial observation because retrieval occurred in July, before the end of the publication and indexing year.

The search combined a curriculum block with an implementation block. For reproducibility, the Boolean logic was operationalised in Scopus as follows:

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TITLE-ABS-KEY("curriculum reform*" OR "curricular reform*" OR "curriculum change" OR "curricular change" OR "curriculum implementation" OR "curriculum enactment" OR "curriculum innovation" OR "curriculum redesign" OR "curriculum renewal" OR "competency-based curriculum" OR "outcome-based curriculum" OR "standards-based curriculum" OR "curriculum policy") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("teacher agency" OR "teacher capacity" OR "implementation capacity" OR "policy enactment" OR "curriculum alignment" OR "assessment alignment" OR "professional learning" OR "school reform" OR "educational reform") AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2027 AND (LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE, "ar") OR LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE, "re")) AND LIMIT-TO(SRCTYPE, "j") AND LIMIT-TO(LANGUAGE, "English")
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The search was restricted to English-language journal articles and reviews. Conference papers, book chapters, editorials, notes, letters, non-English items, and records outside the observation period were excluded. The final corpus contained 641 documents. Records were exported with author names, titles, years, source titles, abstracts, author keywords, indexed keywords, affiliations, citation counts, and document types.

The dataset was imported into Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny. Keyword cleansing was deliberately conservative. Terms were lower-cased for comparison; punctuation and obvious hyphenation differences were harmonised; and unambiguous singular-plural or morphological variants were standardised when they denoted the same construct. For example, variants such as professional learning community/professional learning communities were treated as one concept, whereas curriculum reform, curriculum implementation, and curriculum enactment were retained separately

because their relationships were analytically central. Abbreviations were expanded only when the corresponding full term was unambiguous in the record metadata. This procedure follows recent recommendations to make data cleaning transparent without collapsing substantively distinct concepts (Lim et al., 2024).

Metadata quality was checked before network interpretation. Two fields required caution: the export returned structurally implausible zero values for cited references and international co-authorship. Co-citation, bibliographic-coupling, historiographic, and international-collaboration analyses were therefore excluded rather than interpreted from incomplete fields. The year 2026 was retained in trend displays but interpreted only as a provisional partial-year signal.

The analysis proceeded through five linked procedures. Network node size represented keyword frequency, link strength represented co-occurrence, and clustering identified groups of related terms. The thematic map used centrality to represent external connectedness and density to represent internal development, distinguishing motor, basic, niche, and emerging-or-declining themes. Correspondence analysis and hierarchical clustering examined conceptual distance and higher-order groupings, while trend-topic analysis traced the timing and duration of prominent terms. Because bibliometric proximity is associational, the analysis did not interpret co-occurrence as causality or consensus.

Table 1. Analytical Procedures and Interpretive Purposes

Procedure	Output	Purpose
Performance analysis	Documents, sources, authors, growth, citations	Establish the size and development of the field
Source and citation analysis	Relevant sources and visible documents	Identify publication concentration and influential contributions
Keyword co-occurrence	Network and conceptual clusters	Map relations and bridging concepts
Thematic and conceptual analysis	Centrality, density, factorial map, hierarchy	Distinguish developed themes and conceptual polarisation
Trend-topic analysis	Frequency and active time span	Trace changes in research emphasis

Source: Authors' methodological design.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Growth and Profile of the Field

The corpus comprised 641 documents published in 334 sources by 1,496 authors and contained 1,769 author keywords. The annual growth rate was 11.93%, average authorship was 2.54 co-authors per document, mean document age was 7.26 years, and mean citation count was 15.61 per document. The combination of rapid growth and a substantial accumulated corpus indicates a field mature enough for its organising concepts to be mapped while still expanding strongly.

Annual production was low during the first decade and accelerated after 2011. Output increased from 4 documents in 2000 to 45 in 2024 and reached an observed peak of 96 in 2025. A further 75 documents had already been indexed by July 2026. The apparent decline from 2025 to 2026 therefore cannot be interpreted as a reversal because 2026 is incomplete. The acceleration after 2023 is consistent

with the growing policy prominence of competency-oriented reform, teacher professionalism, institutional readiness, and implementation research. The description and characteristics of the study dataset can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 1 below:

Table 2. Reliable Descriptive Characteristics of the Dataset

Indicator	**Value**
Timespan	2000-July 2026
Documents	641
Publication sources	334
Authors	1,496
Single-authored documents	193
Author keywords	1,769
Annual growth rate	11.93%
Co-authors per document	2.54
Average document age	7.26 years
Average citations per document	15.61

Note: Cited-reference and international-co-authorship fields were excluded because the export returned structurally implausible zero values.

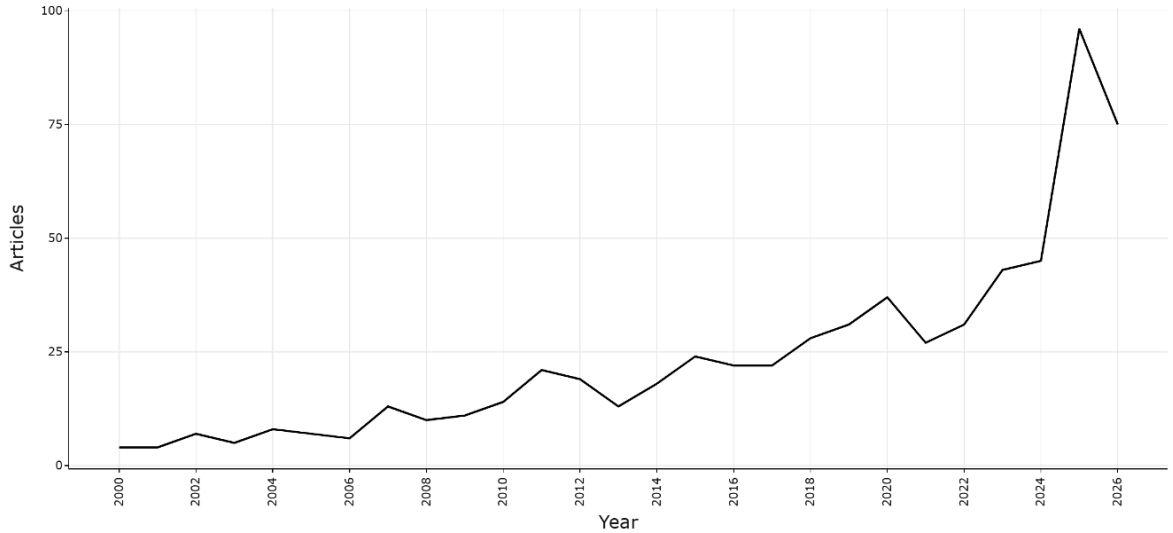

Figure 1. Annual scientific production, 2000-2026

Source: Authors' analysis of Scopus data using Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny.

Sources and Conceptual Structure

The Curriculum Journal was the most productive source with 31 documents (4.84% of the corpus), followed by the Journal of Curriculum Studies with 23 (3.59%). Together, the two leading outlets

accounted for only 8.42% of all documents, while the remaining 587 documents were distributed across 332 sources. This dispersion confirms that curriculum implementation is not contained within one disciplinary outlet; it is studied through curriculum theory, teacher education, educational change, sustainability, professional education, and subject-specific pedagogy. The distribution broadens the empirical base but also helps explain terminological fragmentation across sectors.

The author-keyword co-occurrence network organised the field into three connected clusters. The broad pedagogical-institutional cluster was centred on curriculum and linked to teaching, learning, education, curriculum development, and medical education. A reform-and-agency cluster was centred on curriculum reform and connected with teacher agency, educational reform, curriculum change, professional development, curriculum implementation, and professional learning communities. A smaller governance cluster contained curriculum policy and policy enactment. Curriculum and curriculum reform were the visually dominant bridging nodes, whereas policy enactment linked macro-policy language with practice-oriented research.

The placement of teacher agency inside the reform cluster is substantively important. Rather than appearing as a peripheral individual attribute, agency is embedded among professional learning, implementation, and organisational change. This pattern is consistent with empirical work showing that agency depends on professional space, collaboration, identity, organisational arrangements, and material resources (Alvunger, 2018; Brodie, 2021; Hall et al., 2024; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Kneen et al., 2023; Ogwang, 2023). The network therefore supports a relational interpretation in which implementation emerges from interactions among policy instruments, professional judgement, institutional context, and pedagogy.

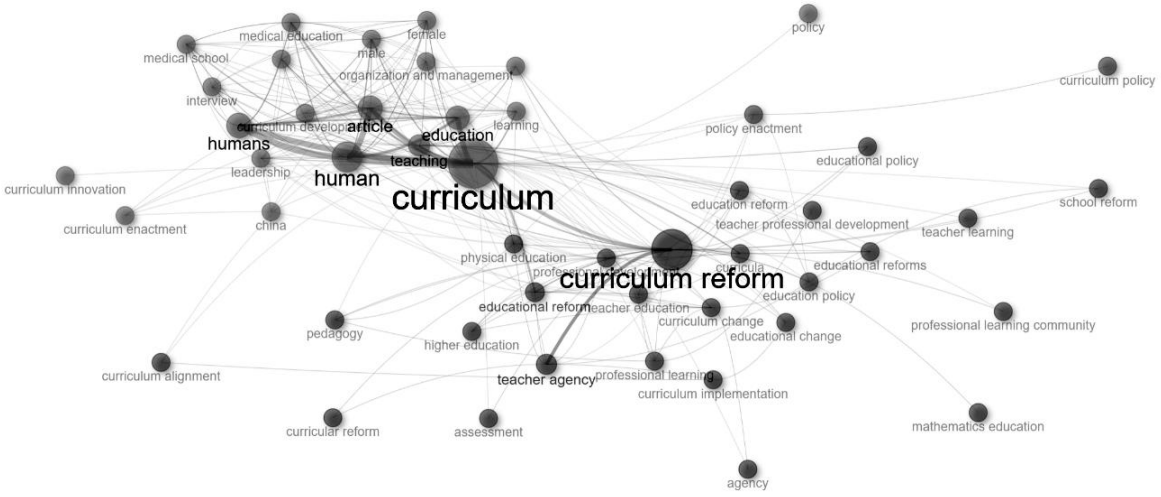

Figure 2. Author-keyword co-occurrence network

Source: Authors' analysis of Scopus data using Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny.

Thematic and Temporal Evolution

The thematic map placed curriculum reform, teacher agency, and educational reform in the motor-theme quadrant, indicating the combination of relatively high centrality and density characteristic of internally developed themes that are strongly connected to the wider field. The cluster containing curriculum, human, and education occupied a mature foundational position. A small curricular reforms cluster appeared in the emerging-or-declining quadrant; given the prominence of the singular term curriculum reform in the motor cluster, this is more plausibly interpreted as lexical displacement than disappearance of reform research.

Correspondence analysis separated reform- and teacher-oriented research from a specialised medical-education strand, while hierarchical clustering distinguished a human-subject and

professional-education branch from a larger curriculum branch. This disciplinary differentiation matters because implementation mechanisms vary by sector. Accreditation and procedural competence may be particularly influential in professional education, whereas examinations, textbooks, staffing, and local resource disparities can be more consequential in school systems. The mapped structure therefore supports a search for general dimensions of implementation capacity without assuming that their operational expression is identical across domains.

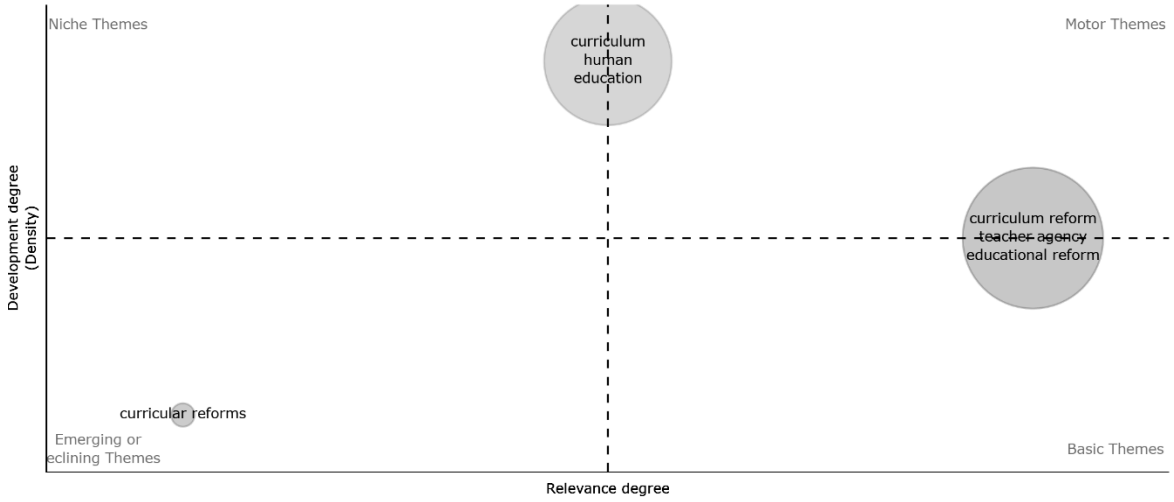

Figure 3. Thematic map based on keyword centrality and density

Source: Authors' analysis of Scopus data using Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny.

Trend-topic analysis shows a temporal movement from managerial and institutional concerns toward teacher-level enactment. Earlier topics included teacher training, organisation and management, medical school, and curriculum development. Between approximately 2016 and 2023, curriculum, educational reform, school reform, and curriculum reform became prominent. In the most recent period, emphasis shifted toward curriculum enactment, teacher professional development, teacher autonomy, case-study research, and primary school. This sequence indicates a change in analytical emphasis rather than a replacement of reform: research increasingly asks how reform is interpreted in specific settings and what professional conditions shape adaptation.

Recent empirical studies reinforce that interpretation. Long-term professional development can make curriculum adaptation more systematic (Nalbantoğlu & Bümen, 2024), agency-oriented professional learning can connect reform tools with professional goals (Zhang et al., 2023), and diagnostic intervention can identify constraints on agency during curriculum transitions (Dinh & Sannino, 2024). The growing visibility of autonomy and case studies therefore reflects closer attention to variation, micropolitics, and the mechanisms through which formal reform becomes classroom practice.

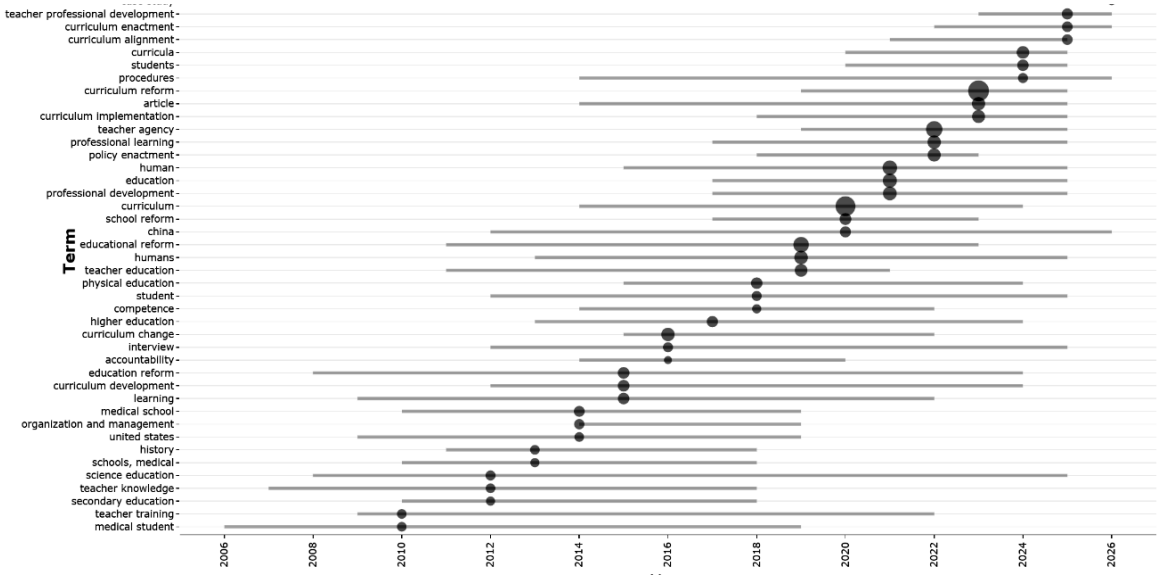

Figure 4. Trend topics across the observation period

Source: Authors' analysis of Scopus data using Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny.

Discussion

From Bibliometric Structure to Curriculum Implementation Capacity

The co-occurrence, thematic, conceptual, and temporal results converge on a common problem: curriculum change cannot be explained adequately either by formal policy design or by individual teacher competence alone. Curriculum reform remains the field's central organising idea, but its strongest contemporary connections increasingly involve teacher agency, professional development, enactment, institutional support, and assessment-related coherence. On that basis, this study derives curriculum implementation capacity as the collective ability of an education system and its actors to interpret, adapt, coordinate, enact, evaluate, and sustain curriculum change in ways that remain coherent with educational purposes and responsive to local conditions.

The construct is not inferred from one keyword or cluster. It is a synthesis across four mapped signals. First, the reform-and-agency cluster links formal change with teacher agency, professional development, implementation, and professional learning communities. Second, the governance cluster connects curriculum policy and policy enactment with practice. Third, the thematic map identifies reform and agency as mature motor themes rather than isolated topics. Fourth, trend analysis shows increasing attention to enactment, autonomy, and context-specific case research. The six dimensions in Table 3 translate this convergent structure into an analytic framework that links professional action, organisational conditions, policy instruments, and feedback.

Table 3. Dimensions of Curriculum Implementation Capacity

Dimension	Operational meaning	Indicative policy focus
Professional agency	Knowledge, beliefs, judgement, identity, and informed action	Teacher participation and bounded professional autonomy
Institutional support	Leadership, time, trust, resources, and organisational routines	School-level implementation architecture
Collaborative learning	Repeated interpretation, experimentation, evidence review, and revision	Sustained, practice-connected professional development

Dimension	Operational meaning	Indicative policy focus
Curriculum-assessment alignment	Coherence among outcomes, pedagogy, assessment, and accountability	Assessment and accountability reform
Material and policy infrastructure	Guidance, curriculum resources, data, technology, and policy support	Equitable provision and usable implementation tools
Contextual responsiveness and feedback	Defensible adaptation informed by learners, context, and implementation evidence	Local flexibility with continuous monitoring

Source: Conceptual synthesis developed from the bibliometric results.

Positioning the Six-Dimension Construct

Curriculum implementation capacity extends rather than replaces established implementation theories. Spillane et al. (2002) explain why actors' sense-making is central to implementation; the present construct retains that cognitive and social mediation within professional agency and collaborative learning, but adds organisational, assessment, infrastructure, and feedback conditions that determine whether sense-making can become coherent system practice. Remillard (2005) explains the participatory relationship through which teachers interpret and use curriculum materials; implementation capacity broadens that interaction from teacher-material relations to the institutional and policy arrangements that make materials usable, resourced, and aligned with assessment. Priestley et al. (2015) explain agency ecologically as an achievement shaped by temporal and structural conditions; the capacity framework retains this ecological insight but shifts the unit of analysis from agency itself to the multi-level system conditions required to sustain defensible enactment.

This multi-level emphasis is the principal theoretical advantage of the construct. At the micro level, teachers require knowledge, judgement, identity, and room for informed action. At the meso level, schools require leadership, time, trust, routines, collaborative learning, and access to resources. At the macro level, policy makers must provide coherent curriculum standards, assessment signals, guidance, infrastructure, and feedback arrangements. Imants and Van der Wal (2020) similarly emphasize dynamic relationships across teacher, school, and above-school levels; curriculum implementation capacity adds explicit attention to curriculum-assessment alignment, material-policy infrastructure, and evidence-based feedback as system capacities. It therefore offers a bridge between teacher-agency research and reform-governance research rather than treating them as separate literatures.

The capacity perspective also clarifies why adaptation can be either productive or corrosive. Enactment is not successful merely because teachers exercise autonomy. Adaptation may make a curriculum more responsive to learners, but it may also narrow curricular ambitions, fragment progression, or reproduce inequity. Research on standards-based curricula and teacher autonomy shows that professional judgement is always situated within expectations, relationships of trust, accountability, and available guidance (Alvunger, 2018; Bergh & Wahlström, 2018; Harris & Graham, 2019; Narayanan et al., 2024). Implementation quality should therefore be judged by whether local decisions are educationally defensible, coherent with reform purposes, and informed by evidence.

Operational Policy and School-Level Implications

For policy, curriculum documents should be accompanied by an implementation architecture that specifies how the six dimensions will be developed, supported, and monitored. Ministries and district education offices need to treat professional learning, assessment reform, resources, and feedback as integral components of curriculum policy rather than downstream add-ons. At school level, principals need routines that turn external reform into collective interpretation, protected learning time, resource

allocation, evidence review, and documented adaptation as can be seen in the Table 4. This is consistent with research showing that leaders actively assemble local arrangements, legitimise experimentation, and mediate tensions between reform and accountability (Hall et al., 2024).

Table 4. Operationalisation of Curriculum Implementation Capacity Across Governance Levels

Dimension	Ministry/district action	Principal/school action	Monitoring evidence
Professional agency	Include teachers in design, piloting, and review; define non-negotiable learning outcomes and areas for local discretion.	Create structured teacher participation in curriculum decisions and coaching focused on professional judgement.	Teacher participation records, adaptation rationales, observed instructional decisions.
Institutional support	Set minimum resource and time expectations; fund implementation support proportionate to school need.	Protect planning/collaboration time, coordinate workloads, and provide psychologically safe leadership.	Allocated time, resource access, implementation routines, staff feedback.
Collaborative learning	Fund continuous, practice-connected professional development rather than one-off dissemination.	Use professional learning communities, lesson inquiry, peer observation, and evidence review.	Participation continuity, inquiry products, changes tested and revised.
Curriculum-assessment alignment	Audit national/local assessments for consistency with intended competencies and curriculum outcomes.	Align classroom assessment, tasks, and feedback with intended outcomes while monitoring progression.	Assessment blueprints, task samples, moderation evidence, outcome coverage.
Material and policy infrastructure	Provide usable guidance, exemplars, data systems, technology, and equitable access to curriculum resources.	Curate and adapt resources transparently; ensure staff can access guidance and data.	Resource inventories, access gaps, guidance use, data-system functionality.
Contextual responsiveness and feedback	Create feedback channels from schools and use implementation evidence for iterative policy adjustment.	Document local adaptations, examine learner evidence, and review unintended effects on equity and standards.	Adaptation logs, learner evidence, equity indicators, review-cycle decisions.

Source: Authors' policy operationalisation of the six-dimension framework.

In Indonesia, *Kurikulum Merdeka* expands teacher discretion, but greater flexibility should not be interpreted as unrestricted curricular autonomy. Nihayah et al. (2023) caution that autonomy without sufficient guidance and institutional support may produce inconsistent instructional practices, while Tjandra (2024) emphasises that differentiated learning must remain aligned with national educational aims. Teacher agency is therefore better understood as 'bounded professional agency', in which teachers adapt curriculum within shared expectations for learning outcomes, progression, and equity. Local adaptations should be justified by learner and contextual evidence, while assessment, moderation, and feedback should function as safeguards against curricular drift, inequity, and excessive narrowing.

Such agency depends on sustained professional learning rather than episodic training. Curriculum

reform requires teachers to interpret standards, redesign learning tasks, assess complex competencies, and exercise professional judgement in diverse classrooms. However, participation in professional learning communities should not itself be equated with instructional improvement. Freires et al. (2026) show that agency strengthens when teachers actively participate in interpreting and adapting reform, whereas Christensen and Jerrim (2025) demonstrate that the instructional effects of professional learning communities remain uneven across contexts. Professional learning should therefore be evaluated through evidence of sustained inquiry, experimentation, feedback, and observable changes in practice rather than attendance or training hours alone. Moreover, professional learning cannot compensate for incoherent policy signals. Pastore et al. (2025), Scully et al. (2025), and Rice et al. (2026) indicate that when assessment and accountability reward narrower outcomes, teachers may rationally respond through test-oriented practices or curriculum narrowing. Implementation problems should thus be interpreted not only as deficits in teacher capacity, but also as possible consequences of policy incoherence.

This issue becomes more complex in Indonesian Islamic education, where reform operates across regulatory, pedagogical, institutional, and religious logics. Supriyanti et al. (2025) and Mumtahanah et al. (2026) show that planning, stakeholder participation, mentoring, institutional readiness, and continuous evaluation are important, but these capacities are not context-neutral. Madrasahs and Islamic schools must align national curriculum expectations with commitments to religious knowledge, moral formation, and institutional traditions. Recent studies similarly show that curriculum innovation in Islamic education depends on pedagogical agency, transformational leadership, value integration, and locally grounded forms of educational authority (Nur Munajat & Muqowim, 2025; Pahrudin et al., 2026; Siswadi et al., 2026; Syarifah Rahmah et al., 2025). Reform capacity should therefore be understood not simply as the presence of organizational resources, but as the ability to mobilize them in ways that are pedagogically credible, institutionally workable, and religiously legitimate.

From a comparative education perspective, this distinction challenges the assumption that reform models travel intact across systems. Policy borrowing involves translation, negotiation, and recontextualization as transnational ideas encounter national histories, institutional arrangements, and local knowledge systems (Magalhães et al., 2026; Manathunga et al., 2025; Steiner-Khamsi, 2025). Indonesian Islamic education thus illustrates a distinction between 'formal convergence' and 'enacted divergence': similar reform structures may be adopted across systems, yet acquire different meanings and effects once mediated by local authority, organizational culture, and normative commitments. The contribution of the present framework is therefore to distinguish 'capacity availability' from 'capacity mobilization'. Rather than asking only whether systems possess common reform capacities, comparative analysis should examine how those capacities are locally translated, legitimized, contested, and enacted. This shifts reform capacity from a universal checklist toward a relational and context-sensitive explanation of why similar policy structures generate different educational outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. First, it used a single database and an English-language restriction, which underrepresent scholarship indexed only in regional databases or published in national languages. Second, requiring both a curriculum term and an implementation-related term improved conceptual precision but may have omitted studies using different vocabulary. Third, missing cited-reference and international-collaboration fields prevented co-citation, bibliographic-coupling, historiographic, and international-collaboration analyses. Fourth, bibliometric association cannot determine how authors define concepts or whether a specific implementation strategy is effective. Finally, 2026 was only partially observed because data were retrieved in July; the most recent trend signals are therefore provisional.

Future research should test the six dimensions through systematic qualitative coding, multi-level implementation studies, longitudinal designs, and comparative work in underrepresented Global South

settings. Multi-database replications that combine Scopus with Web of Science and regional indexes would test the stability of the mapped structure. Empirical studies should also develop indicators for each dimension and examine whether combinations of professional agency, institutional support, collaborative learning, assessment alignment, infrastructure, and feedback predict more coherent and equitable enactment over time.

4. CONCLUSION

Global research on curriculum reform, implementation, and enactment expanded substantially between 2000 and July 2026. Across 641 Scopus-indexed documents, curriculum and curriculum reform remained the principal organising concepts, while teacher agency, professional development, policy enactment, curriculum enactment, and assessment-related coherence became increasingly connected. The field has therefore not abandoned reform; it has progressively relocated reform from policy prescription to the processes through which educators and institutions produce practice.

Curriculum implementation capacity provides an integrative lens for this transition. It comprises six interdependent dimensions: professional agency, institutional support, collaborative learning, curriculum-assessment alignment, material and policy infrastructure, and contextual responsiveness and feedback. Together they explain why technically sound reforms can remain superficial and why local adaptation can either strengthen or weaken policy purposes. In practice, ministries and districts should pair curriculum reform with continuous, practice-connected teacher learning and explicit alignment of national assessment instruments, while school leaders should create structured routines for collaborative interpretation, evidence review, and bounded adaptation.

The conclusions remain constrained by the use of Scopus alone and by the partial observation of 2026, as well as by the limits of bibliometric association for evaluating causal effectiveness. Future multi-database, longitudinal, and comparative research should therefore test the proposed dimensions directly and examine how different capacity configurations shape educationally meaningful enactment across settings.

DECLARATIONS

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Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics statement. The study analysed bibliographic metadata and did not involve human participants, personal data collection, or animals; institutional ethics approval was therefore not required.

Data availability. The bibliographic dataset was retrieved from Scopus, a subscription database. The search strategy and analytical parameters are reported in the manuscript. A cleaned export may be shared by the corresponding author where permitted by the database licence.

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