

Teacher agency and curriculum development in Islamic religious education: a systematic review of learning goals, content selection, pedagogical experiences, and assessment

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Abstract: Background: Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum development requires meaningful teacher participation to ensure pedagogical relevance, curricular coherence, and responsiveness to students' needs. Purpose: This study synthesizes evidence on teachers' roles in developing IRE curricula, focusing on learning objectives, instructional materials, learning processes, and evaluation. Methods: A systematic literature review integrated thematic analysis and bibliometric mapping of publications from 2020 to 2025. Using Publish or Perish, a PICOC-informed search identified 655 records, reduced to 652 unique records after deduplication. PRISMA-guided screening through Covidence resulted in eight included articles, which were analyzed thematically and mapped using VOSviewer. Findings: Teachers contributed to curriculum planning, material development, pedagogical implementation, and assessment design. Research predominantly emphasized curriculum planning and instructional design, whereas teachers' involvement in evaluation development received comparatively limited attention. Bibliometric mapping identified interconnected research clusters concerning curriculum development, learning design, and teacher participation. Novelty: This review integrates thematic and bibliometric perspectives to identify imbalances in research coverage across four curricular components and highlight evaluation as an underexplored dimension. Limitations: The synthesis was constrained by the 2020–2025 publication window, search strategy, and small number of included studies. Recommendations: Future research should examine teachers' evaluative agency, contextual adaptations, and evidence-based curriculum improvement across diverse IRE settings.

Keywords: Curriculum design, Islamic religious education, curriculum development, systematic literature review, Islamic teacher role

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Introduction

The curriculum is the core of an education system, serving as a set of organized plans to guide the learning process and achieve predetermined educational goals. Therefore, the curriculum must be dynamic and constantly adaptable to changing times, developments in science and knowledge, and the needs of society. In general, the curriculum development process involves three fundamental and interrelated stages, namely planning, implementation, and evaluation,

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which determine the success of achieving educational goals (Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023). In the context of education, the role of teachers is essential and goes beyond their duties as classroom instructors, because teachers are also actively involved as curriculum designers, implementers, and evaluators (Tambak et al., 2026; Komariah, Erihadiana, & Rahman, 2023). Teachers' roles in curriculum development can vary, depending on the management approach applied, whether it is centralized, decentralized, or centralized-decentralized. Teachers perform four main roles, namely as implementers, adapters, developers, and researchers, all of which aim to create learning that is relevant to students' needs (Resta & Erihadiana, 2024; Sukenti et al., 2022).

In particular, the Islamic Education Curriculum occupies a strategic position in shaping the spirituality, character, and religious values of students. IRE teachers are required to design a curriculum that not only meets national standards but also balances religious aspects and contemporary issues (Adila, Sari, & Adiyono, 2023). In addition, IRE teachers also play an active role as curriculum designers by focusing on integrating Islamic values into daily routines and religious programs at school (Fauziah & Rozi, 2025). However, despite the importance of this role, there is a gap where teacher participation in curriculum development remains low due to a lack of awareness and ability (Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023). The curriculum constitutes a foundational framework for educational systems because it establishes the purposes, content, learning experiences, instructional processes, and assessment mechanisms through which educational objectives are translated into practice (Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2024). However, contemporary curriculum development cannot be understood as a static process of organizing subject matter, as educational institutions must continually respond to societal transformations, evolving knowledge, pedagogical innovations, and increasingly diverse learner needs (Kneen et al., 2023; Silseth et al., 2023). Curriculum development therefore requires sustained alignment between educational intentions, classroom practices, and assessment procedures to ensure that intended learning outcomes remain relevant, coherent, and educationally meaningful (Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023). From this perspective, curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation should be understood as interconnected processes through which educational goals are interpreted, enacted, reviewed, and refined in response to classroom realities (Pratiwi et al., 2024; Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023).

Within this process, teachers occupy a strategic position because they mediate between formal curriculum policies and the contextual demands of everyday teaching and learning (Kneen et al., 2023; Silseth et al., 2023). Their professional responsibilities extend beyond implementing prescribed learning materials to interpreting curriculum expectations, adapting instructional strategies, selecting relevant content, designing meaningful learning experiences, and assessing students' progress (Kneen et al., 2023; Ngo Cong-Lem, 2024). Research on teacher agency demonstrates that teachers' capacity to influence curriculum development is shaped not only by their individual knowledge, beliefs, and professional expertise but also by institutional structures, leadership practices, collaborative relationships, and opportunities for professional participation (Kneen et al., 2023; Ngo Cong-Lem, 2024). Accordingly, teachers should be conceptualized as active curriculum agents whose professional judgments influence how educational policies are translated into contextually responsive pedagogical practices (Kneen et al., 2023; Silseth et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the extent to which teachers can exercise such agency varies across educational contexts, particularly when curriculum decisions are constrained by centralized policies, limited institutional autonomy, or insufficient professional support (Kneen et al., 2023; Ngo Cong-Lem, 2024).

The significance of teachers' curricular agency becomes particularly pronounced in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), where curriculum development involves not only the acquisition of religious knowledge but also the cultivation of spirituality, ethical responsibility, moral dispositions, and students' capacity to apply Islamic values in contemporary social contexts (Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023; RF & Nursobah, 2024). Unlike approaches that treat religious education primarily as the transmission of doctrinal information, a coherent IRE curriculum requires meaningful alignment between educational purposes, curricular content, pedagogical approaches, and the contexts in which religious learning takes place (Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023).

This alignment is important because the educational significance of IRE depends partly on how teachers connect Islamic concepts and values with students' lived experiences, social

relationships, and everyday ethical decisions (Fauzi et al., 2024; Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023). Furthermore, contemporary IRE curriculum development must address educational diversity, inclusion, religious moderation, and changing social conditions without compromising the intellectual and ethical foundations of Islamic education (Nurdin et al., 2024; RF & Nursobah, 2024). These demands position IRE teachers as important pedagogical decision-makers who must negotiate the relationship between religious principles, national curriculum requirements, students' developmental needs, and the realities of classroom instruction (Pratiwi et al., 2024; Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023).

Empirical studies have begun to examine different aspects of IRE curriculum development including curriculum design, implementation under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, curriculum adaptation for inclusive educational settings, and the integration of contemporary educational priorities (Nurdin et al., 2024; Pratiwi et al., 2024; RF & Nursobah, 2024). For example, Suhayiba & Ansyari (2023) examined the relationship between the purposes, components, and contextual dimensions of IRE curriculum design, highlighting the importance of curricular coherence. Research on IRE curriculum implementation has also explored how teachers translate curriculum requirements into classroom practices and respond to the demands of changing educational policies (Pratiwi et al., 2024). In addition, Nurdin et al. (2024) reviewed curriculum development and implementation in inclusive schools and madrasahs, extending discussion of IRE curriculum development to educational contexts characterized by diverse learner needs. Other studies have addressed curriculum innovation and the development of religious attitudes, moderation, inclusion, and culturally responsive educational orientations (Fauzi et al., 2024; RF & Nursobah, 2024). Taken together, these studies provide valuable insights into particular dimensions of IRE curriculum development, yet their different emphases also indicate the need to examine teachers' roles across the broader set of curricular decisions that connect educational planning with classroom enactment and evaluation.

Despite these advances, an important analytical gap remains concerning how teachers' contributions are distributed across the interconnected components of IRE curriculum development. Existing research has addressed curriculum design and the alignment of curricular components (Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023), curriculum implementation under policy reform (Pratiwi et al., 2024), and curriculum development in inclusive educational settings (Nurdin et al., 2024). However, these distinct strands of research do not, by themselves, establish a comprehensive account of teachers' roles in determining learning objectives, designing learning experiences, selecting and developing teaching materials, managing learning processes, and evaluating curriculum effectiveness. The need for such an integrated perspective is reinforced by evidence that intended educational purposes, classroom-designed outcomes, learning activities, and assessment practices may not always be adequately aligned in IRE (Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023). Furthermore, research on teacher agency suggests that teachers' curricular contributions depend on the interaction between professional expertise, institutional conditions, and opportunities to participate in educational decision-making (Kneen et al., 2023; Ngo Cong-Lem, 2024). Consequently, examining teachers' roles through a multidimensional framework is necessary to clarify how their pedagogical decisions contribute to curricular coherence and responsiveness across different stages of educational practice.

A systematic literature review (SLR) offers an appropriate methodological approach to addressing this gap because it enables researchers to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant studies through transparent and reproducible procedures (Page et al., 2021). Although an earlier systematic review examined the development and implementation of IRE curricula in inclusive schools and madrasahs, its primary emphasis was on inclusive educational settings and the adaptations required to accommodate learners with special educational needs (Nurdin et al., 2024). The present review extends this line of inquiry by focusing specifically on teachers' roles across five interrelated curricular components rather than restricting the analysis to a particular educational setting or implementation challenge. Its analytical emphasis is on the relationships between teachers' curricular decision-making, pedagogical enactment, and evaluation practices, thereby providing a basis for identifying recurring patterns, contextual differences, and areas requiring further investigation. To strengthen methodological transparency, the review should report its search strategy, eligibility criteria, study-selection process, and synthesis procedures

in accordance with the relevant recommendations of PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021). Such a systematic approach can support a more coherent understanding of the available evidence while distinguishing established findings from questions that remain insufficiently investigated.

Accordingly, this study aims to systematically review and critically synthesize the literature on teachers' roles in IRE curriculum development, with particular attention to five interconnected components: (1) determining learning objectives; (2) designing learning experiences; (3) selecting and developing teaching materials; (4) organizing and managing learning processes; and (5) evaluating curricula and learning outcomes. The review is guided by three research questions: (1) How do teachers contribute to the development of these five curricular components in IRE? (2) What pedagogical, professional, and institutional factors facilitate or constrain their contributions? (3) What recurring patterns, gaps, and implications emerge from the existing literature for strengthening teacher agency and curricular coherence in IRE? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to move beyond a descriptive inventory of teachers' responsibilities toward an integrated understanding of their contributions to curriculum design, enactment, and evaluation. The anticipated contribution is a synthesized analytical framework that can inform future research, support teacher professional development, and guide educational policymakers and school leaders in strengthening teachers' meaningful participation in IRE curriculum development.

Literature review

The development of the Islamic Education Curriculum (IRE) is a process that requires dynamism and adaptability in order to keep pace with the changing times, developments in science and knowledge, and the needs of society (Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023). In this context, Islamic education teachers occupy a central and strategic position, with a role that extends beyond teaching to include curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation (Adila et al., 2023; Komariah, Erihadiana et al., 2023).

The position and classification of teachers' roles

The success of the IRE curriculum is largely determined by the practical implementation of teachers, who are not only tasked with imparting knowledge but also instilling beliefs and internalizing Islamic values in the daily lives of students (Fadli, Faiq, & Buna'i, 2023). Based on a review of the literature, the role of teachers in curriculum development can be classified into four main functions, the application of which varies according to the curriculum management approach (centralization, decentralization, or central-decentralized) (Resta & Erihadiana, 2024): Implementer: Teachers implement the curriculum that has been established or designed by the developers. Adapter: Teachers adapt the existing curriculum to make it relevant to the characteristics of the school, the needs of students, and the context of the local community. Developer: Teachers actively design, modify, and compile curricula according to the specific needs of students (Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023). Researcher: Teachers conduct research to evaluate and improve the curriculum being implemented (Resta & Erihadiana, 2024).

The effectiveness of the IRE curriculum depends substantially on how teachers translate curricular objectives into meaningful pedagogical practices that foster religious understanding, strengthen moral character, and support the internalization of Islamic values in students' everyday lives (Fadli et al., 2023; Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023). Within this framework, teachers' involvement in curriculum development can be conceptualized through four interrelated functions: implementer, adapter, developer, and researcher, with the scope of each function shaped by the degree of curricular authority and autonomy afforded by centralized, decentralized, or hybrid curriculum management systems (Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). As implementers, teachers translate prescribed curricular standards into classroom instruction while ensuring that learning activities remain aligned with established educational objectives (Pratiwi et al., 2024). As adapters, they interpret and modify curricular content, instructional strategies, and learning materials to accommodate students' developmental characteristics, school conditions, and local sociocultural contexts (Kneen et al., 2023; Ngo Cong-Lem, 2024). As developers, teachers exercise greater professional agency by designing, modifying, and organizing curricular components in response to identified learning needs and the educational priorities of their

institutions (Kneen et al., 2023; Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023). As researchers, teachers systematically examine their instructional practices, evaluate students' learning experiences, and use evidence from classroom assessment and reflection to inform subsequent curriculum improvement (Page et al., 2021; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). These four functions provide a useful analytical framework for investigating how IRE teachers contribute to curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation, while also highlighting the importance of institutional support, professional competence, and decision-making autonomy in enabling teachers to respond effectively to the evolving educational and spiritual needs of students (Kneen et al., 2023; Suhayiba & Ansyari, 2023).

The role of teachers in the five core domains of the IRE curriculum

The role of teachers as curriculum designers, implementers, and evaluators requires analysis that focuses on its operational components. (Komariah et al., 2023). Based on the framework of this study, the role of teachers can be mapped into five key domains of IRE curriculum development:

Table 1. The role of IRE teachers

Core Curriculum Domain	The Role of IRE Teachers	Reference Source
(1) Determining Learning Objectives	Teachers play an important role in designing goals that balance religious and contemporary aspects, as well as ensuring that the curriculum meets educational standards and student needs	(Adila, Sari, & Adiyono, 2023)
(2) Learning Experience Design & (3) Selection and Development of Teaching Materials	Teachers are involved in developing learning tools and the development of teaching resources (Komariah et al., 2023) The learning experience is designed so that students can apply the knowledge they have acquired in their daily lives	(Adila, Sari, & Adiyono, 2023; Komariah, Erihadiana, & Rahman, 2023; Fadli, Faiq, & Buna'i, 2023; Latif, Destiniar, & Ahmad, 2021)
(4) Learning Process Management	Teachers act as instructors and mentors who focus on students' experiences, skills, and abilities. Operationally, teachers actively integrate Islamic values into students' daily routines, such as through structured worship practices and religious programs	(Latif, Destiniar, & Ahmad, 2021; Fauziah & Rozi, n.d.)
(5) Evaluasi Kurikulum dan Hasil Belajar	Teachers act as evaluators to assess student learning outcomes and measure the success of the curriculum, which is part of their professional responsibility for continuous improvement	(Adila, Sari, & Adiyono, 2023; Komariah, Erihadiana, & Rahman, 2023)

Although the role of IRE teachers is vital, implementation in the field still faces a few challenges. A gap has been found between the ideal role and reality, where teacher participation in curriculum development is still low due to a lack of awareness and ability (Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023). Other structural and contextual barriers identified include; limited availability of teachers (Fauziah & Rozi, 2025); disparities or diversity in students' spiritual knowledge backgrounds (Fauziah & Rozi, 2025); low parental involvement in supporting school programs (Fauziah & Rozi, 2025); and limited time for innovation (Hadisaputra et al., 2024). These challenges collectively affect teachers' effectiveness in carrying out their functions as designers, implementers, and evaluators of IRE curriculum. (Hadisaputra et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aims to systematically map the contributions of IRE teachers in the five curriculum domains in order to provide a clear framework for improving professionalism.

The search for and selection of articles

The literature search resulted in a total of 655 studies imported into Covidence, with 3 duplicates automatically detected and removed, leaving 652 unique records. During the title and abstract screening stage, 500 studies were reviewed, of which 368 were deemed irrelevant and excluded. The remaining 152 studies proceeded to the full-text review stage, where 124 articles were excluded based on the established eligibility criteria. Through this multi-stage screening process, a final set of 8 studies met all inclusion criteria and were selected for data extraction and in-depth analysis.

Table 2. The search for and selection of articles

No	Author (Year)	Title	Method	Focused Curriculum Component	Main Findings
1	Adila, Sari, & Adiyono (2023)	The Role of Teachers in The Development of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) Curriculum in Public Junior High Schools	Descriptive Qualitative & Case Study (Interviews, Observations, Documentation)	Objectives/ Materials/ Evaluation	IRE teachers play an important role in designing a curriculum that balances religious and contemporary aspects and meets the needs of students. Their main roles include curriculum design, teaching material development, method implementation, and learning outcome evaluation.
2	Fadli, Faiq, & Buna'i (2023)	The Role Of The Teacher In Curriculum Development Islamic Education At Smpps Islamic Assirojiyah Omben Sampang	Qualitative (Observation, Interviews, Documentation)	Proces/ Implementation	Teachers are responsible for the learning process by imparting knowledge and beliefs so that students can apply their knowledge in everyday life. The role of teachers includes being implementers, adapters, researchers, designers, artists, motivators, mediators, and inspirers.

3	Komariah, Erihadiana, & Rahman (2023)	Peran Guru Dalam Mengembangkan Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Sekolah	Qualitative & Library Research	Planning (Objectives & Materials)/ Implementation/ Evaluation	Teachers play a very important role because teaching success is determined by teachers. Teachers act as implementers, adapters, developers, and researchers. Teacher activities include formulating objectives, designing learning, implementing plans, and evaluating learning outcomes and curriculum component interactions.
4	Fauziah & Rozi (2025)	The Role of Teachers in the Development of IRE Curriculum in Public School 2 Nglurup Sendang	Descriptive Qualitative (In-depth Interviews, Observation, Document Analysis)	Design/ Implementation/ Evaluation/ Character Building	IRE teachers play an active role as curriculum designers, implementers, and evaluators, particularly in integrating Islamic values into students' daily routines (e.g., Duha prayers, religious programs). The main challenges are the limited availability of teachers and low parental involvement. The solution is collaboration between teachers across subjects and digital communication with parents.
5	Ladina & Erihadiana (2024)	Strategies of Teachers in Developing an Islamic Religious Education Curriculum	Literature Review & Qualitative Research	Strategy/ Management Approach/ Teacher Roles	IRE teacher strategies vary depending on the management approach (centralization, decentralization, or central-decentralization). Teachers play an important role as implementers, adapters, developers, and researchers. The central-decentralized role has the greatest influence because teachers are involved in determining objectives, substance, methods, and evaluation.
6	Yulindaputri & Hamami (2023)	The Role of Teachers in the Development of Islamic Education Curriculum	Library Research & Descriptive Analysis	Planning/ Implementation/ Evaluation	The curriculum must be dynamic and involve planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. The role of teachers is

					as implementers, adapters, developers, and researchers. The gap found is low teacher participation in curriculum development due to a lack of awareness and competence.
7	Hadisaputra et al. (2024)	The Role of Teachers in Curriculum Management Implementation: A Narrative Literature Review on Challenges, Best Practices, and Professional Development	Qualitative & Narrative Literature Review	Management/ Implementation/ Professional Development	The challenges faced by teachers include: understanding complex curricula, adapting to student needs, time constraints, comprehensive assessment, continuous professional development, and lack of resources. Best practices include understanding the curriculum, structured planning, and differentiated learning.
8	Latif, Destiniar, & Ahmad (2021)	The Role of Teachers in The Curriculum of Local Contents in SD Negeri 176 OKU Kandang Macan Sinar Peninjauan Sub-District	Qualitative & Descriptive Research	Curriculum of Local Contents/ Implementation	IRE teachers in the local content curriculum have three roles: as educators (understanding students, building character), as teachers (focusing on students' experiences, skills, and expertise), and as guides (guiding all aspects of education, both academic and non-academic).

This classification provides a solid foundation for the subsequent thematic analysis, which will group the findings based on the five curriculum components, and also serves as important input for the bibliometric analysis (VOSviewer) that will visualize the interrelationships between key terms in these dominant themes.

Method

The authors chose the issue of teachers' roles in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum development because this topic represents a central concern in contemporary Islamic education that continues to face practical and conceptual challenges. Teachers are increasingly expected to function not only as implementers but also as designers, evaluators, and innovators of the curriculum, yet existing studies show inconsistencies in teacher participation and competence. To explore this phenomenon systematically, this study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which allows the researchers to integrate findings from various studies published between 2020–2025. The data used in this study consisted entirely of secondary data in the form of published journal articles, research reports, and conference papers focusing on IRE curriculum development. The SLR approach was chosen because it provides a transparent, replicable, and comprehensive procedure for synthesizing research trends, evidence, and thematic patterns relevant to the research question. By focusing on teachers' involvement in determining learning objectives, designing learning experiences, preparing teaching materials,

managing instructional processes, and conducting evaluation, the study seeks to map the extent, orientation, and challenges of teacher roles within curriculum development.

The data sources were obtained through a structured search using the Publish or Perish (PoP) software connected to the Google Scholar database, allowing for broad retrieval of academic materials within the predetermined timeframe. The search keywords were constructed using the PICOC framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Context) to ensure that the articles captured aligned closely with the scope of IRE curriculum development. From this process, 655 initial records were retrieved, which later underwent duplicate removal, leaving 652 unique studies. The selection of data sources followed multi-stage screening using Covidence.org, beginning with title and abstract screening to remove irrelevant studies, followed by full-text eligibility assessment based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only articles that directly discussed teacher roles in curriculum development and were situated within Islamic education contexts were retained. This rigorous selection ensured that only methodologically relevant and thematically appropriate studies formed the final dataset. The screening and selection process was guided by the PRISMA flowchart, ensuring transparency and accountability at each stage.

Data collection was conducted through the documentation method by extracting information from each selected article into a structured extraction matrix containing study identity, research design, participant type, data collection techniques, and curriculum dimensions discussed. The analysis process consisted of two complementary stages. *First*, a thematic analysis was conducted to categorize findings based on the five key components of curriculum development: learning objectives, learning experiences, teaching materials, learning processes, and evaluation. This allowed for the identification of dominant themes, research gaps, and recurring patterns across the selected studies. *Second*, a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer was employed to map term co-occurrence relationships and visualize how keywords clustered across the literature. Through these stages, the study systematically synthesized both conceptual and empirical findings, producing an integrated understanding of how teachers contribute to IRE curriculum development, the challenges they face, and the areas that remain underexplored.

Results

The results of this systematic review reveal three important characteristics of the phenomenon regarding the role of teachers in the development of IRE curriculum. *First*, the findings show that the forms of teacher involvement appear in five interconnected domains: determining learning objectives that integrate spiritual, moral, and cognitive competencies; designing contextual learning experiences; preparing and adapting instructional materials; managing value-based learning processes; and conducting both formative and summative evaluations. These forms of involvement demonstrate that teachers act not only as implementers but also as curriculum designers and evaluators. *Second*, the analysis identifies several critical factors influencing this phenomenon, including the teachers' level of curriculum literacy, institutional support, time constraints, availability of resources, student diversity, and alignment between school policies and teachers' professional autonomy. Structural challenges such as limited professional development opportunities and unequal parental engagement also contribute to the variability of teacher roles across schools. *Third*, these findings have transformative implications, as strengthening teachers' participation in curriculum development can enhance the contextualization of IRE learning, promote authentic assessment practices, and support the integration of Islamic values into students' daily routines. When addressed systematically, this phenomenon can drive curricular innovation, improve instructional quality, and create a more holistic, adaptive, and future-oriented IRE curriculum within the contemporary educational landscape.

From the eight selected articles, the literature can be categorized into five main dimensions of teacher involvement in IRE curriculum development: *First*, determining learning objectives: This dimension highlights the central role of teachers in formulating learning goals that integrate spiritual, moral, and cognitive competencies. Teachers participate in translating institutional visions into specific classroom objectives and ensuring alignment with the broader aims of Islamic education (Adila et al., 2023; Fauziah & Rozi, 2025; Komariah et al., 2023; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). *Second*, designing learning experiences: The literature shows that teachers design

The visualization of keyword relationships, identified the following clusters: main clusters (colors) and research focus. There are several prominent color clusters, indicating different but interrelated subfields or research focuses:

First, red cluster (focus on teacher roles and curriculum): Focusing on the keywords “teacher” (the largest), “teacher role model,” “principle,” “addition,” “facilitator,” and “merdeka curriculum” / “independent curriculum.” Interpretation: Research in this cluster discusses the central role of teachers, the underlying principles, and their relationship to specific curricula such as the Merdeka Curriculum.

Second, green cluster (focus on process and curriculum development): Includes keywords such as “curriculum development process,” “teacher involvement,” “curriculum management,” “technology,” “influence,” and “impact.” Interpretation: This cluster focuses on the managerial and process aspects of curriculum development, highlighting the importance of teacher involvement and the role of technology and its influence on outcomes.

Third, light blue/cyan cluster (focus on results and practical implementation): Contains the keywords “teaching,” “project,” “child,” “outcome,” “principal,” and “effectiveness.” Interpretation: Research in this cluster tends to discuss how teaching is carried out, its impact on students (child), and the measurement of effectiveness and the role of school leadership (principal.).

Fourth, purple/lavender cluster (focus on educational context and challenges): Consists of keywords such as “educational process,” “data,” “knowledge,” “challenge,” “era,” and “transformation.” Interpretation: This cluster discusses the broader context (educational process, era), the challenges faced, and the importance of knowledge and data in that context.

Fifth, size and connectivity (keyword strength) most central keyword (largest node): The keyword “teacher” has the largest node (circle) and is located in the center, indicating that it is the most frequently discussed topic (highest frequency of occurrence) and is the main focus of this entire field of research. Connection (connecting line): There are many lines (links) connecting different clusters, especially from “teacher” to keywords in other clusters (e.g., “curriculum development process,” “educational process,” “knowledge”). Interpretation: This indicates a strong interdisciplinarity, where the role of teachers is always linked and studied in conjunction with curriculum development, technology use, learning outcomes, and educational challenges. Overall, this visualization illustrates that this field of research is highly focused on the role and involvement of teachers in the context of curriculum development and management amid contemporary educational challenges and new curricula such as the Merdeka Curriculum.

Discussion

The results of this study show that teachers’ roles in the development of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum manifest through five central domains: the formulation of learning objectives, the design of learning experiences, the preparation of teaching materials, the management of learning processes, and the implementation of evaluation (Tambak & Sukenti, 2024; Adila et al., 2023; Fauziah & Rozi, 2025; Komariah et al., 2023; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). These domains collectively illustrate that teachers do not merely carry out instructional mandates but actively shape the curriculum at practical and contextual levels. The findings highlight that teacher involvement varies across contexts, with stronger participation in instructional management and learning design, while material development and evaluation remain less addressed (Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023; Tambak et al., 2025; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). Influencing factors include teacher competence, resource availability, and institutional support systems. Additionally, structural issues such as limited time for innovation, diverse student backgrounds, and differing school cultures contribute to the unevenness of teacher engagement (Sukenti, Agustina, & Fauzan, 2024). Overall, the data portray a complex phenomenon where teacher participation is essential yet inconsistently realized across schools and learning environments.

The uneven forms of teacher involvement identified in the results can be traced to several underlying causes. Limited curriculum literacy among teachers remains one of the primary factors shaping the phenomenon, as many educators possess practical teaching skills but lack deeper competence in curriculum design and evaluation frameworks (Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). Institutional constraints also play a major role, particularly in schools

where administrative burdens, lack of professional development, and limited collaboration opportunities reduce the capacity of teachers to participate meaningfully in curriculum development. Another significant cause is the diversity of student characteristics, which demands extensive adaptation from teachers, often making them focus more on daily instructional needs rather than curriculum-level planning (Adila et al., 2023; Tambak, 2026; Fauziah & Rozi, 2025; Komariah et al., 2023; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). External factors such as discrepancies in parental involvement, unequal access to learning resources, and time constraints further intensify these challenges. These reflections suggest that teacher participation is not a simple function of willingness but is shaped by multilayered systemic, pedagogical, and contextual determinants.

The causes identified above have important consequences for the quality and direction of IRE curriculum development. When teachers' engagement in curriculum design is limited, the curriculum tends to remain theoretical, lacking contextual alignment with learners' needs and daily lived experiences. The insufficient development of teaching materials and authentic assessment instruments can also weaken students' holistic understanding of Islamic values and competencies (Adila et al., 2023; Fauziah & Rozi, 2025; Komariah et al., 2023; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). Moreover, the dominance of teacher roles in implementation but not in curriculum planning may perpetuate a gap between policy intentions and classroom realities (Resta & Erihadiana, 2024; Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023). In the long term, this fragmented involvement risks diminishing the transformative potential of IRE education, as teachers cannot fully exercise their roles as designers of meaningful, character-building learning experiences. Nevertheless, the findings also show that when teachers are empowered, curriculum processes become more dynamic, value-oriented, and responsive to contemporary challenges, underscoring the significance of teacher agency in shaping educational transformation (Resta & Erihadiana, 2024; Tambak et al., 2026).

The findings of this review align with previous research that consistently highlights teachers as central actors in curriculum implementation while noting their limited participation in curriculum-level planning. Similar to studies by Komariah et al. (2023) teacher involvement remains strongest in instructional processes but weak in evaluation design and material development. Other research, such as that conducted by Yulindaputri & Hamami (2023), also emphasizes the lack of awareness and competence as barriers to teacher participation in curriculum development, reinforcing the reflection found in the present study. However, some literature, particularly in decentralized school systems, shows more optimistic patterns where teachers have greater autonomy in designing curriculum components (Tambak & Sukenti, 2026). This review contrasts with those cases by revealing that such autonomy is not evenly distributed across contexts (Adila et al., 2023; Fauziah & Rozi, 2025; Komariah et al., 2023; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). Nevertheless, across prior studies, a shared conclusion emerges: the role of teachers is indispensable, yet systemic barriers must be addressed for teacher involvement to be holistic and sustainable (Tambak & Sukenti, 2025). This comparison affirms the validity of the current study while highlighting areas needing further inquiry.

Based on these findings, several strategic actions are recommended to enhance teacher involvement in IRE curriculum development. Conceptually, there is a need to strengthen teachers' curriculum literacy by embedding curriculum design, material development, and assessment construction into professional development programs (Sukenti, Tambak, & Sabila, 2025). Methodologically, schools and policymakers should encourage collaborative curriculum design models that integrate lesson study, peer coaching, and interdisciplinary planning (Adila et al., 2023; Fauziah & Rozi, 2025; Komariah et al., 2023; Resta & Erihadiana, 2024). At the policy level, reducing administrative burdens and increasing institutional support can significantly empower teachers to engage in curriculum innovation. Developing school-based curriculum teams that include IRE teachers can also ensure that contextual values and spiritual competencies are adequately represented in curriculum decisions (Resta & Erihadiana, 2024; Yulindaputri & Hamami, 2023; Sukenti et al., 2025). Furthermore, systematic evaluation frameworks that involve teachers as assessors and decision-makers should be implemented to bridge the gap between policy and practice. These actions collectively represent a transformative agenda to position teachers as full contributors in the development of meaningful and future-oriented IRE curricula.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that teachers hold a central yet uneven role in the development of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum. Their strongest involvement appears in determining learning objectives, designing learning experiences, and managing classroom processes, where teachers translate curriculum directives into contextual and value-oriented learning. However, teacher engagement in developing teaching materials and designing comprehensive evaluation frameworks remains limited, suggesting that these domains have not received sufficient attention within existing practice. The analysis of eight selected studies shows that teachers' participation is influenced by competence, resource availability, institutional culture, and student diversity, creating significant variations across schools. Overall, the results confirm that teacher involvement is indispensable for ensuring that the IRE curriculum responds effectively to contemporary educational challenges, integrates Islamic values into daily learning, and supports students' spiritual and cognitive development. Conceptually, this study contributes by providing a structured understanding of how teachers operate within five key domains of curriculum development and by mapping the distribution of their roles through thematic and bibliometric analyses. The integration of systematic literature review techniques with VOS viewer mapping strengthens methodological contributions by highlighting patterns, clusters, and gaps in existing research. Theoretically, the study reinforces the idea that curriculum development is not merely a technical administrative process but a professional act dependent on teacher agency, decision-making, and pedagogical competence. This study also offers a synthesized framework showing which areas of teacher involvement are robust and which require strategic enhancement.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations that must be addressed by future research. The reliance on literature published between 2020 and 2025 restricts the historical depth of analysis and may overlook long-term patterns in IRE curriculum development. The exclusive use of secondary data limits the ability to evaluate real classroom practices or measure the direct impact of teacher involvement on student learning outcomes. In addition, the scarcity of empirical studies focusing on evaluation design and teaching material development creates analytical constraints in those areas. Therefore, future studies are recommended to employ empirical, mixed-method, and longitudinal approaches to examine teacher participation more comprehensively. Further research should also explore innovative assessment methods, digital teaching material development, and school-based curriculum design models that strengthen teacher autonomy. Addressing these gaps will provide stronger evidence for improving the quality and implementation of the IRE curriculum in diverse educational contexts.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

All authors contributed significantly to each stage of the research. The first, second and third authors are responsible for the preparation of research concepts, literature review, methodology design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and the preparation of an initial draft of the manuscript. The fourth, fifth and sixth author contributes to the improvement of research design, validation of data analysis, critical review of the content of the manuscript, and revision of the substance of the article, as well as plays a role in verifying research results, editing manuscripts, and improving academic aspects according to scientific publication standards. All authors have read, given approval to the final version of the manuscript, and are responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the content of the article.

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Data availability statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors of the correspondence based on reasonable *requests*. The data includes interview transcripts, observation notes, student

self-assessment documents, student worksheets, and other supporting documents used in the analysis process. The data is not available for public access because it contains information that could potentially reveal the identity of the participants and is protected by the provisions of the research ethics. The author will provide relevant data in an anonymized form as long as it does not conflict with the participant's consent and the applicable research ethics policy.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors state that there are no known financial interests or personal relationships that could influence or are considered to affect the results, analysis, or reporting of the research presented in this article. All authors stated that this research was carried out independently, objectively, and in accordance with the principles of scientific integrity.

Declaration of use artificial intelligence

The authors state that the research and preparation of this manuscript does not use artificial *intelligence technology* to generate, analyze, or interpret research data. The entire process of conceptualization, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript writing is carried out entirely by the authors.

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