



Managing Curriculum Development in Islamic Boarding Schools: Integrating Faith and Pedagogical Values.

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 13 November 2025

Received in revised form 9

December 2025

Accepted 28 December 2025

Keywords:

Curriculum Development

Values

Pesantren

Abstract

This study examines curriculum needs in Islamic boarding schools through a qualitative needs analysis approach grounded in in depth interviews with key educational stakeholders. Participants included teachers students curriculum division staff and institutional leaders who are directly involved in curriculum enactment and decision making within the pesantren system. The study aims to explore how curriculum needs are experienced and articulated across different roles and to identify shared priorities that can inform value oriented curriculum development. Data were analyzed thematically to capture recurring patterns of needs embedded in everyday educational practices. The findings reveal that curriculum needs in Islamic boarding schools are systemic and relational rather than technical in nature. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of meaningful integration of Islamic values across subjects pedagogical flexibility learning relevance and coherent evaluation practices. These needs reflect a shared aspiration to maintain Islamic identity while responding to contemporary educational demands. The study concludes that a needs driven and participatory approach provides a robust foundation for curriculum reform in Islamic boarding schools by aligning curriculum development with lived experiences institutional values and future oriented educational goals.

Introduction

The curriculum is a fundamental component of the education system that serves to determine the direction, content, and quality of the learning process for students (Kusmawan et al., 2025; Huong et al., 2025; Ilyina, 2025). More than just an administrative tool, the curriculum is a strategic instrument that integrates national educational goals with the ever-changing needs of modern society. In the context of globalization and the 4.0 industrial revolution, the curriculum is required to produce students who are not only academically competent but also possess social, spiritual, and digital skills (Fauzan, 2024). In Islamic education, the curriculum has a more comprehensive meaning because it includes intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions rooted in the teachings of monotheism and Qur'anic values (Muhaimin 2019; Sugiarto, 2025; Yudhyarta et al., 2025; Fatimah et al., 2025).

Hasan Langgulung explains that the main objective of Islamic education is the formation of insan kamil, or humans who are balanced between physical, intellectual, and spiritual potential. The curriculum in Islamic education serves not only to transfer knowledge but also to instill

moral values and shape a comprehensive spiritual awareness. In practice, the development of the Islamic education curriculum faces various challenges, especially in integrating Islamic principles with the competency requirements of the 21st century. These challenges include efforts to maintain the relevance of Islamic values amid rapid technological advances and the globalization of education. (Latifah, Hidayat, and Amin, 2023), Jaelani observes that many Islamic educational institutions are still stuck in a ritualistic approach that emphasizes the formal aspects of worship, but have not fully integrated Islamic values into digital literacy and critical thinking skills (Jaelani 2022). Sari expressed a similar view, finding that the mismatch between graduate profiles and global job market demands is caused by weak curriculum innovation in bridging spiritual values and professional competencies. (Sari, 2022) Meanwhile, research by Laila et al. shows tension between the implementation of the national curriculum and the pesantren-specific curriculum, which often creates a dilemma between maintaining Islamic identity and meeting national accreditation standards. (Laila, Maulana, and Fauzi, 2025)

A number of studies also highlight the need for a new paradigm in the development of an Islamic education curriculum based on the integration of knowledge and values. (Abdullah 2018; Rusman 2019; Srinio et al., 2025) This integrative approach assumes that Islamic education must place the values of tawhid, balance (tawâzun), and unity of knowledge (takâmul) as the epistemological foundations that guide the direction of learning. With this, it can be concluded that the urgency of developing an Islamic education curriculum in the 21st century does not only lie in technical or administrative aspects, but more in its epistemological ability to synergize Islamic spiritual values with modern educational theory. Thus, the Islamic education curriculum needs to be directed towards becoming an adaptive, visionary, and value-based system, in order to produce a generation of Muslims who are superior, have good character, and are globally competent without losing their Islamic roots (Rahman, 2025; Razak, 2025).

In the last two decades, the direction of Islamic education curriculum development in Indonesia has shown significant dynamics in line with the demands for the integration of Islamic values into the modern education system (Mufarokah et al., 2025; Intan et al., 2025; Andri et al., 2025). Various studies show that the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum still largely adopts Western approaches such as the Tyler, Taba, and Walker models without an epistemological reconstruction process rooted in the principles of tawhid and maqâsid al-syarī'ah. Other studies by Laila et al. and Sari confirm that curriculum implementation in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools tends to be descriptive and focused on administrative aspects, without touching on the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of curriculum planning and evaluation. (Laila, et al. 2025 ; Sari, 2022) Meanwhile, Fauzan and Abdullah found that the integration of Islamic values in the curriculum is still partial, limited to the learning of morals and fiqh, rather than a holistic curriculum management system.

In general, previous studies have shown an epistemological and methodological gap between systematic Western curriculum theory and the holistic Islamic paradigm, as well as the absence of an integrative model that combines the three within the framework of Islamic values. Based on these gaps, this study offers a novelty in the form of a conceptual synthesis between the Tyler, Taba, and Walker models and the basic principles of Islam tauhid, tawâzun, takâmul, maqâsid al-syarī'ah, and shūrā which results in a new conceptual model called the "Integrative-Islamic Curriculum Framework." This model combines Tyler's systematic structure, Taba's participation and field requirements, and Walker's contextual deliberation within an Islamic epistemological framework. This approach not only harmonizes modern rationality with Islamic spirituality but also offers a holistic, participatory, and contextual curriculum paradigm. Thus, this study contributes theoretically to strengthening the philosophical basis of Islamic

value-based curriculum development and, practically, provides an adaptive Islamic education curriculum model for the challenges of the 21st century without losing its Islamic identity.

Scientifically, this study is expected to enrich the scientific knowledge in the field of Islamic education curriculum development based on the epistemological integration between the Islamic paradigm and modern educational theory. This study provides a theoretical contribution in the form of an expansion of the conceptual framework of curriculum management and development rooted in the values of tauhid, tawâzun, and takâmul, while also being responsive to the competency needs of the 21st century. Through the synthesis of the Tyler, Taba, and Walker models with the basic principles of Islam, this research has the potential to strengthen the philosophical foundation of value-based curriculum development in the context of contemporary Islamic education. Practically, the results of this research can be a strategic reference for Islamic educational institution administrators, especially madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools, in designing an integrative, contextual, and visionary curriculum. Furthermore, this research is expected to encourage the emergence of a new paradigm in Islamic curriculum development that balances cognitive, affective, spiritual, and digital aspects, thereby producing graduates who are intellectually superior and have Islamic character. Thus, this research not only contributes conceptually to the development of Islamic curriculum theory but also offers practical implications relevant to Islamic education policy and innovation in Indonesia. From these controversies, it becomes evident that the field lacks a comprehensive and integrative model capable of reconciling Western systematic curriculum theory with the Islamic epistemological worldview.

This study positions itself at the intersection of these diverging perspectives by proposing an Integrative-Islamic Curriculum Framework a conceptual synthesis combining Tyler's systematic logic, Taba's participatory structure, and Walker's deliberative contextuality with Islamic principles of tawhid, tawâzun, takâmul, maqâsid al-syarī'ah, and shūrā. Through this synthesis, the study aims to transform the debate from polarization to integration, offering both theoretical reconciliation and practical innovation for 21st-century Islamic education.

Methods

The research design in this study makes use of a qualitative design, which is based on a thorough needs analysis in which the study will make use of thorough interviews. The needs analysis framework was strategically selected to probe the educational, curricular and institutional needs of the modern Islamic boarding schools in a systematic manner, thus, enabling the creation of Islamic value-based curriculum to be sensitive to the new pedagogical issues. The research attempts to anticipate the views of the participants by foregrounding the perspectives of the participants in attempts to capture curriculum needs as they are lived, negotiated as well as narrated by the key actors in the Pesantren system.

The study was conducted in the selected modern Islamic boarding schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia. These institutions were also chosen intentionally due to the active participation in curriculum development and the joint action of the institutions to combine the values of Islam with general education. The exemplary Islamic boarding schools provide an example of the institutions whereby curriculum planning is not just limited in official documentations, but is embedded in everyday pedagogical, managerial, and spiritual activities.

The respondents in this study were selected amongst all major stakeholder groups in the Pesantren system to ensure that the needs analysis is done in a comprehensive and systemic manner. These included those teachers who instruct the subject being covered in the curriculum, the students who are directly involved in the curriculum, curriculum division and

academic management units, school managers, Pesantren leaders. The fact that several groups of participants are involved in the studies is an indication that the need of curriculum in Islamic boarding schools is multidimensional, and that it is influenced by the interactions between pedagogical, institutional, and spiritual actors.

Selection of the participants was performed through purposive sampling strategy which relied on the roles assigned, responsibilities and direct participation in curriculum implementation and processes of curriculum decisions. Teachers and curriculum personnel were selected based on their experience in curriculum planning and delivery of instructions where the students were randomly selected based on senior levels to make sure they were very exposed to the curriculum. The school administrators and leaders of Pesantren were called in in order to give their input on the vision of the institutions, the considerations of the policies and the long term educational goals.

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were the major data collection techniques used with specific focus on extracting the perception of curriculum needs as held by the participants. The interview guide was aimed at establishing the disparities existing in the current curriculum practice and the intended educational outcomes, especially the Islamic value, character building, academic skills, digital literacy and social relevancy. Perceived challenges, unmet needs, and expectations on future curriculum development in the Pesantren setting were also investigated with the help of interviews.

All the interviews took between forty-five and ninety minutes and took place in a relaxed environment where the respondents would feel free to speak out and respond adequately. All the audio recording of interviews was done with informed consent and transcription in their verbatim to ensure natural voices of the participants. Field notes were also recorded to ensure that the contextual and non-verbal elements that were relevant in interpreting the data were captured.

Thematic analysis strategy, which is consistent with the needs analysis model, was used to analyse the data. The analysis began with open coding in order to determine expressed needs, concerns, and expectations among the groups of participants. Such codes were later grouped into the larger themes that represented academic needs, spiritual and moral needs, pedagogical needs, institutional and managerial needs, and socio-cultural adaptation needs. The aim of the analysis based on iterative comparison was to find the convergences and differences in perceived needs of teachers, students, curriculum staff, and school leadership.

Results and Discussion

Curriculum Needs as Articulated by Teachers

Teachers described curriculum needs through their everyday engagement with teaching practices and classroom realities. They consistently framed curriculum not only as a formal guide but as a lived structure that shapes how Islamic values are enacted in learning. A recurring concern was the perceived gap between the explicit inclusion of Islamic values in curriculum documents and their practical realization during instruction. Teachers acknowledged that values were emphasized rhetorically, yet they often struggled to translate these values into pedagogical actions that meaningfully shaped learning processes.

One teacher reflected on this challenge by stating, *“I know the curriculum emphasizes Islamic values, but in the classroom I often struggle to make those values visible in the way I teach, not just in what I say.”* This sentiment illustrates how values were frequently experienced as abstract ideals rather than as guiding principles embedded in instructional design and classroom interaction.

This concern was closely connected to teachers' expressed need for pedagogical flexibility. Many teachers described the curriculum structure as highly prescriptive, particularly in terms of content sequencing and pacing. While they recognized the importance of structure in maintaining academic discipline, they felt constrained in adapting instruction to students' needs and classroom dynamics. As one teacher explained, *"Sometimes the curriculum feels too fixed. I want to adjust my teaching to students' needs, but the structure does not always allow that flexibility."* For teachers, flexibility was not viewed as a deviation from Islamic discipline, but as a necessary condition for making learning meaningful and responsive.

Assessment practices further reinforced teachers' perceptions of unmet curriculum needs. Teachers repeatedly noted that assessment focused predominantly on cognitive achievement, with limited mechanisms to evaluate students' moral development, attitudes, and spiritual growth. This imbalance created discomfort, as it did not fully align with the holistic educational goals of the pesantren. One teacher expressed this concern by noting, *"We assess students mainly on written tests, but their character and attitude are just as important, and those aspects are difficult to capture in the current system."* These experiences led teachers to articulate a need for clearer institutional guidance and shared frameworks for value oriented assessment.

Students' Perceived Learning and Curriculum Needs

Students articulated curriculum needs based on their learning experiences and aspirations for the future. They generally expressed appreciation for the moral discipline and spiritual environment of the pesantren, yet they also described learning processes as largely teacher centered and limited in opportunities for active engagement. Many students felt that learning emphasized listening and memorization rather than dialogue and reflection, which reduced their ability to connect lessons with their lived experiences.

One student captured this concern by stating, *"I learn many things, but often I just listen and memorize. I wish we had more discussions so I could really understand how the lessons relate to my life."* This reflection suggests that students perceived a gap between curriculum content and meaningful learning experiences.

Students also emphasized the importance of curriculum relevance for their future academic and social pathways. They viewed the curriculum as a crucial factor in preparing them for further education and participation beyond the pesantren. While religious instruction remained highly valued, students expressed a desire for learning that also supported the development of transferable skills. As one student explained, *"I want to continue my studies after pesantren. I think the curriculum should help us develop skills that we can use outside, not only religious knowledge."* These needs were articulated as complementary to Islamic education rather than as competing priorities.

In addition, students reflected on the balance between discipline and exploration within the learning environment. Although discipline was widely accepted as part of pesantren life, students expressed a desire for greater intellectual space to ask questions and share ideas. One student noted, *"We are taught to be disciplined, which is good, but sometimes I want more space to ask questions and share my ideas."* This perspective indicates that students viewed curriculum needs as opportunities to deepen understanding and internalize values through reflective engagement.

Curriculum Needs Identified by Curriculum Division Staff

Curriculum division staff articulated curriculum needs from an institutional and managerial perspective, focusing on coherence and implementation. A prominent concern was the lack of clear operational frameworks that translate value based curriculum ideals into consistent instructional practices. While shared Islamic values provided a strong sense of identity, staff members observed that reliance on implicit understanding often led to variations in implementation across subjects and classrooms.

One curriculum staff member explained, *“Our curriculum values are strong, but we do not always have clear operational guidelines, so implementation can differ from one class to another.”* This observation highlights the gap between curriculum intentions and practical enactment at the classroom level.

Evaluation emerged as another central area of need. Curriculum staff acknowledged that moral and spiritual development formed the core mission of the pesantren, yet assessment practices in these areas remained largely informal. Without structured tools, it was difficult to monitor progress or evaluate curriculum effectiveness systematically. As one staff member noted, *“We believe character education is central, but we still lack formal tools to evaluate moral and spiritual development consistently.”* This concern reinforced the view that evaluation was not merely a technical issue but an ethical responsibility aligned with institutional values.

Curriculum staff also pointed to challenges related to coordination and documentation. Difficulties in aligning curriculum plans, teaching practices, and institutional goals were particularly evident during curriculum revisions. Inconsistent documentation was perceived as limiting continuity and weakening institutional learning, underscoring the need for a more coherent and sustainable curriculum system.

Institutional and Leadership Perspectives on Curriculum Needs

School leaders and pesantren administrators articulated curriculum needs through a strategic and future oriented lens. They consistently emphasized the importance of preserving Islamic identity as the foundation of curriculum development. For leaders, the curriculum represented a moral commitment that must remain faithful to the spiritual mission of the pesantren.

At the same time, leaders acknowledged the necessity of curriculum adaptability in response to social and educational change. They viewed reform not as a departure from tradition but as a means of sustaining relevance and institutional credibility. One leader explained, *“Our priority is to preserve Islamic identity, but we also realize that the curriculum must respond to changes in society.”* This perspective reflects an understanding of curriculum as a dynamic process rather than a fixed structure.

Leaders also emphasized the importance of participatory and needs driven decision making. They believed that curriculum reform would be more effective and sustainable when grounded in the lived experiences of teachers and students. As one administrator stated, *“Curriculum decisions should not come only from management. Teachers and students need to be heard so the curriculum reflects real needs.”* This view positioned needs analysis as a critical foundation for institutional coherence and long term development.

Convergence of Curriculum Needs Across Stakeholders

Across all participant groups, a strong convergence of curriculum needs was evident. Despite differences in roles and perspectives, stakeholders consistently emphasized the importance of meaningful integration of Islamic values, pedagogical responsiveness, learning relevance, coherent evaluation practices, and future oriented curriculum planning. These shared concerns

suggest that curriculum needs in Islamic boarding schools are systemic rather than isolated or role specific.

Overall, the findings indicate that curriculum needs in the pesantren context are relational and experiential in nature. Participants did not frame needs as deficiencies to be corrected but as signals for reflective improvement grounded in daily educational practice. This needs analysis therefore provides a comprehensive empirical foundation for curriculum development that remains faithful to Islamic values while engaging constructively with contemporary educational demands.

The results of this analysis prompt greater revision of the current conceptualization of the process of curriculum development in the Islamic boarding schools not only in terms of technical compliance but also in terms of administrative compliance. Instead of presenting the needs of curriculum development as circumvention, missing, or deficiency to be remedied, the findings indicate that curriculum development in pesantren is an epistemic and ethical process that is informed by lived educational realities. Such a view is consistent with the new scholarship that views curriculum as a plan of instruction but as a moral and cultural project that expresses institutional identity and educational purpose. Latifah, Hidayat, and Amin (2023) assert that Islamic education curriculum rebuilding should be based on values and context instead of the imported framework, a view that has a strong connection with the need-driven orientation that has been developed in the context of this research.

Another of the greatest implications of the findings is the continuing appeal of meaningful incorporation of Islamic values in subjects. This requirement spans existing arguments on value incorporation which tend to be on the symbolic incorporation level. According to Aslan (2023), even in Islamic schools, values are still treated not as the arrangement of the principles of learning. The current results enhance this criticism by proving the fact that the same practitioners feel that the process of value integration is incomplete when pedagogical processes and assessment practices are not influenced by Islamic principles. Likewise, Hidayat and Marzuki (2022) highlight that tauhid must be used as an epistemological prism to direct the logic of curricula and not a separate religious teaching. According to the needs formulated in this paper, the educators are demanding exactly such an epistemological integration where values will guide the building and use of knowledge.

The focus on pedagogical malleability, found in the present research, also adds to the current debates on the topic of teacher agency in the Islamic education. Recent research points at the inflexible structure of curriculum that in most cases limits the capacity of teachers to address learner diversity and contextual challenges. It is shown by Fauzan (2024) that the standardization and pedagogical responsiveness clash in pesantren where the curriculum is being transformed. This argument is supported by the current findings which have shown that teachers do not think of flexibility as opposition to structure but as a precondition of effective teaching in terms of values. This is in line with Rusman (2019) who asserts that curriculum effectiveness within Islamic institutions is based on the provision of interpretive space to educators in order to match curriculum objectives with the realities in the classroom.

In the student view, the relevance and future competencies demands are a symptom of more general change in the perception of the students about the meaning of Islamic education. Sari (2022) discovered that graduates of Islamic institutions are usually missing a bridge between the spiritual formation and preparation to fit into the modern social and occupational realities. The current research provides a twist to this argument by demonstrating that the students do not oppose religious learning but want to have learning experiences that relate the faith with the challenges of real life. This is in line with Azra (2022), who argues that sustainability of

Islamic education on how well it equips students to interact globally without losing their religious identity. Needs expressed by students in this paper therefore represent a rearticulation of relevance that incorporates spirituality and modern competence instead of pitting them against each other as a priority.

The results concerning curriculum administration and analysis also involve the current discussions concerning the issues of coherence and responsibility within the Muslim education systems. Laila, Maulana, and Fauzi (2025) record some conflicts between pesantren-based curricula and national education standards especially on evaluation practices. The current research is a complement to this work because it demonstrates that the managers of the curriculum are aware themselves of the weakness of informal assessment methods, particularly in terms of moral and spiritual growth. Qolbi and Hamami (2021) also decry assessment practices that give preference to cognitive results at the expense of character building. The identified needs in this paper imply that curriculum managers are becoming more aware that evaluation should undergo change that responds to the comprehensive objectives of Islamic education.

The views of leadership at the institutional level support perspectives of the study in arguing that the issue of curriculum development cannot be held without questions of identity and sustainability. Recent scholarly sources point to the fact that Islamic educational establishments have to balance the forces of modernization and retain their specific epistemological backgrounds. According to Latifah et al. (2023), the Society 5.0 requires a curriculum based on a combination of ethically conscious reasoning and technological literacy. The views of the leaders on this research project resonate this stand by conceptualizing curriculum requirements as dynamic and changing instead of being rigid. This is in line with Hidayat (2023) who conceptualizes curriculum integration as a process of never ending negotiation between tradition and innovation.

The methodological debates in the study of curriculum are the result of a collective focus on needs as a determinant of the curriculum. Most of the curriculum reforms are based on top down approaches although recent research points out the significance of participatory approaches. Mundiri and Hasnah (2018) prove the idea that the implementation of the curriculum in the pesantren is more effective in case the teachers and the institutional actors are included in the decision making. The current research elaborates this point by revealing that needs analysis as a diagnostic instrument is not only a diagnostic tool, but a dialogic process, which exposes the common ground of priorities and tensions among stakeholder groups. This supports the argument by Patton (2011) that the evaluation and needs analysis must be developmental as opposed to summative.

There is still a dispute on the literature of the synthesis of Western curriculum logic and Islamic epistemology. Research by Rusman (2019) and Hidayat et al. (2019) records the prevalence of Tyler based models in the discourse of Indonesian curriculum, which in most cases is not reconstructed epistemologically. The results of the present study indicate that the practitioners are not inherently against systematic curriculum planning but require frameworks that would be compatible with the Islamic values and practices. This helps in the call made by Abdullah (2018) to integrate and not disregard the modern curriculum theory. The needs outlined here offer a basis of making empirical measures in the development of curriculum models that are systematic and which make sense spiritually.

The other significance of this research is that it will be used to make inferences on the interpretation of pesantren as adjustive learning systems. However, unlike the stereotypes that pesantren are conservative to change, recent scholarship demonstrates their innovativeness.

Both Fauzan (2024) and Azra (2022) state that pesantren have long been able to adjust to social change without losing significant values. The current results support this perception because they demonstrate that the curriculum requirements presented by stakeholders are focused on the aspects of improvement and sustainability, as well as on preservation not only. This leaves pesantren as direct actors of defining the future of Islamic education.

These findings also address more general arguments about curriculum as an ethical formation. Hudah (2019) claims that value education in Islamic situations should be incorporated in the process of learning, but not limited to moral education. The current work builds up on this argument by demonstrating that values are being lived and practiced according to the perception of stakeholders on the needs of curriculum. This supports the claim made by Hamalik (2013) that curriculum evaluation should be perceived as an ongoing ethical process and not as a final assessment measure.

Conclusion

The current study concludes that the idea of curriculum development in the Islamic boarding schools must be perceived as a value-oriented and participatory process, which is rooted in the experiential activity of the people who must put the curriculum into practice on a daily basis. The needs analysis shows that the curricular issues are caused by the interplay of Islamic values, pedagogical processes, and modern educational needs but not ordinary technical shortage. The convergence of the views between teachers and students, as well as, between the managers of the curriculum and the leaders of the institutions, is to imply that needs in the curricula are systematized and require response that goes hand-in-hand in terms of instructional practice, institutional coherence, and spiritual purpose. Moreover, the research emphasizes that relevant incorporation of Islamic values, pedagogical responsiveness, relevance of learning, and sustainability are key priorities towards curriculum change. Curriculum change is not seen as a threat to Islamic identity by the stakeholders but as an opportunity to reinforce it by way of reflective and needs-oriented innovation. As the stakeholder needs are placed in the center of curriculum decision-making, Islamic-boarding schools can strive both adaptive and futuristic curriculum development and commit to educational mission and their moral obligation.

Acknowledgment

I wishes to express sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the leaders and educational heads of the Pesantrens who participated in this study for their openness, cooperation, and valuable insights into the process of Islamic curriculum development. Profound thanks are also due to the heads of the syllabus units and learning supervisors who provided essential data and shared their professional experiences, making this research rich in both theoretical and practical perspectives.

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