



Curriculum and Instruction as an Integrated System: A Theoretical Review of Educational Literature

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Abstract

This study aims to reconceptualize curriculum and instruction as an integrated and dynamic system by critically examining major strands of educational theory. Rather than treating curriculum as a prescriptive document and instruction as its mechanical implementation, the study explores their relational and systemic interdependence within contemporary educational scholarship. This research employs a qualitative design using a comprehensive literature review approach. Scholarly works from classical curriculum theory to contemporary pedagogical discourse were systematically analyzed through thematic synthesis and conceptual mapping to identify patterns of convergence, divergence, and theoretical gaps regarding the relationship between curriculum and instruction. The findings indicate that curriculum and instruction operate as a recursive and co constructive system rather than a linear implementation chain. Based on this synthesis, the study proposes an Integrated Curriculum Instruction System Model consisting of three interrelated dimensions: the Normative Dimension (philosophy, values, and educational ideology), the Design Dimension (curriculum structure, content organization, and learning outcomes), and the Pedagogical-Enactment Dimension (instructional strategies, classroom interaction, and assessment). This model offers a holistic theoretical framework for understanding curriculum and instruction as mutually shaping educational processes.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in shaping democratic participation, economic competitiveness, and ethical citizenship in contemporary societies. As schooling systems expand and diversify, public expectations toward curriculum relevance and instructional quality continue to intensify (Lailatul Mufarrohah, 2026; Muhammad, 2025b; Muhlis et al., 2025; Muqoffi, Ainun Nafila, 2026). The point of this study lies in addressing the growing demand for coherence between what is formally prescribed in curriculum documents and what is actually enacted in classrooms. The reason this issue is socially significant is that misalignment between curriculum and instruction

can undermine educational equity and learning outcomes. Evidence from international large-scale assessments consistently shows disparities between intended standards and classroom practices, suggesting systemic fragmentation in educational design and implementation (Azizah & Hikmah, Ika Nur, 2026; Muhammad, Wahidmurni Wahidmurni, 2023; Muhammad, 2026b). When curriculum is treated merely as policy text and instruction as technical delivery, educational processes risk becoming procedural rather than transformative (Rahmania & Kurnia, Fitri Ayu, 2026; Subairi, Muhammad Husni, 2025; Zuyyina Linda Sari, Kudsiyeh, Sholi Asrori, 2026). Therefore, re-examining curriculum and instruction as an integrated system is crucial for strengthening educational coherence, improving learning quality, and ensuring that schooling meaningfully contributes to societal development.

Despite extensive reforms in curriculum policy and pedagogical innovation, many educational systems continue to struggle with structural disconnection between curriculum planning and instructional practice. Policymakers often design curriculum frameworks emphasizing competencies, critical thinking, and character development, yet classroom instruction frequently remains content driven and assessment oriented (Hikmah & Umaroh, Siti, 2026; Husen et al., 2026; Ishmah Syafiulloh, Aisyah Nindi Antika, 2026). This discrepancy creates a systemic problem in which curriculum ideals are diluted during implementation. Teachers may perceive curriculum documents as administrative requirements rather than pedagogical guides, while instructional strategies are shaped more by examination pressures than by curricular philosophy. Such fragmentation limits the transformative potential of education and constrains meaningful learning experiences. The persistence of this problem suggests that curriculum and instruction are still conceptualized as sequential and hierarchical processes rather than as mutually constitutive elements of a unified educational system. Addressing this conceptual fragmentation is essential for overcoming recurring cycles of reform that modify curriculum texts without fundamentally transforming instructional realities.

Empirical observations across diverse educational contexts reveal recurring patterns of curricular instructional misalignment (Bisri et al., 2026; Fakhridana et al., 2026; Muhammad, 2026a; Muzedi, Hesim, 2026). In many classrooms, teachers adapt

official curricula to fit contextual constraints, student diversity, and institutional cultures, often generating implicit curricular interpretations that diverge from formal documents (Arisih & Muhammad, 2026; Lailatur Rohanita, Husnul Hilmah, 2026; Muhammad, 2026c; Muhammad & Barizi, 2026). Conversely, standardized assessments frequently shape instructional priorities, indirectly redefining curricular goals. Professional development initiatives sometimes emphasize pedagogical techniques without critically engaging with underlying curricular philosophies, reinforcing compartmentalization (Azaim & Latif, Abdul, 2025; Maqfiroh & Sumarni, Yustina, 2025; Muhammad, 2025a; Muhammad Syauqillah, 2023). These field-level phenomena indicate that instruction does not merely implement curriculum but actively reconstructs it through daily pedagogical decisions (Az-zuhdy & Sirgar, M Taufiki, 2026; Hasbiyalloh, Ifa Farhatin, 2025; Muhammad, H. Nur Ali, 2021; Muqoffi, Muhammad, 2026). At the same time, curriculum frameworks implicitly shape instructional possibilities by defining content boundaries, learning outcomes, and evaluative standards (Bisri et al., 2026). The dynamic interplay observed in practice challenges the linear assumption that curriculum precedes instruction in a unidirectional chain. Instead, real-world educational processes suggest a recursive and co constructive relationship that requires deeper theoretical articulation and systematic clarification.

Scholarly traditions in curriculum studies and instructional theory have long addressed related concerns, yet often from distinct analytical vantage points. Classical curriculum theorists emphasized objectives, content organization, and evaluation as foundational components of educational planning, while instructional theorists focused on strategies, classroom interaction, and cognitive processes. Contemporary scholarship increasingly acknowledges the interdependence of curriculum and pedagogy, particularly within constructivist and critical paradigms (Dehler et al., 2001; Howell, 2016). Studies have explored alignment models, curriculum coherence frameworks, and pedagogical content integration, contributing valuable insights into systemic educational design. However, much of this literature remains either prescriptive or context specific, limiting its capacity to offer an overarching conceptual synthesis. Although integrative efforts exist, they often privilege either curriculum

architecture or instructional technique, leaving their relational ontology under-theorized. Consequently, the field still lacks a comprehensive theoretical framework that conceptualizes curriculum and instruction as components of a recursive, co-constructive system grounded in shared philosophical, structural, and pedagogical dimensions.

Recent academic discourse has begun to question the dichotomy between curriculum and instruction, yet fragmentation persists in theoretical modeling. Some researchers propose alignment theories that emphasize consistency between intended, implemented, and attained curriculum, but these approaches frequently retain linear assumptions (Clarence, 2017; GUNDE et al., 2025). Others examine pedagogical enactment as localized interpretation, highlighting teacher agency without sufficiently integrating macro level curricular design (Alvunger, 2018; Scanlon et al., 2021). This separation produces a research gap: the absence of a systemic model that simultaneously incorporates normative foundations, structural design, and pedagogical enactment within a unified conceptual architecture. Furthermore, prior studies rarely conduct comprehensive theoretical syntheses across paradigms to identify convergent patterns and epistemological tensions. As a result, debates about curriculum reform and instructional innovation continue to operate within partial frameworks. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing theoretical clarity and providing a robust conceptual basis for future empirical and policy oriented research.

The present study contributes to the state of the art by advancing an integrative theoretical reconstruction of curriculum and instruction as an interconnected system. Rather than juxtaposing competing paradigms, this research synthesizes diverse strands of educational literature through qualitative thematic analysis and conceptual mapping. Its novelty lies in proposing an Integrated Curriculum Instruction System Model structured around three interrelated dimensions, Normative, Design, and Pedagogical Enactment. By situating philosophical values, curricular architecture, and instructional practice within a single systemic framework, the study moves beyond alignment discourse toward relational ontology. This integrative perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of how curriculum ideals are translated, negotiated, and reconstituted in classroom realities. The proposed model offers

theoretical clarity that can guide both scholarly inquiry and practical reform, thereby addressing longstanding fragmentation within educational theory.

Based on the identified theoretical and practical challenges, this study addresses the following research problem: How can curriculum and instruction be conceptually reconstructed as an integrated and co constructive educational system within contemporary educational literature? The guiding argument posits that curriculum and instruction operate not as a linear implementation chain but as a recursive system in which normative values inform structural design, structural design shapes pedagogical enactment, and pedagogical enactment continuously reinterprets normative commitments. Through qualitative literature review, the study advances a provisional theoretical answer embodied in the Integrated Curriculum–Instruction System Model. The contribution of this research lies in offering a holistic conceptual framework that bridges disciplinary boundaries within educational theory, clarifies systemic relationships, and provides a foundation for subsequent empirical validation. By reframing curriculum and instruction as mutually constitutive processes, the study seeks to strengthen theoretical coherence and inform more sustainable educational reform.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a literature review (Gentles et al., 2016; Tong et al., 2016) approach to explore and reconstruct the conceptual relationship between curriculum and instruction. The qualitative paradigm is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret meanings, theoretical assumptions, and conceptual interconnections embedded within educational scholarship rather than to measure variables statistically. A literature review design was selected to enable systematic identification, comparison, and synthesis of diverse theoretical perspectives across historical and contemporary sources. By engaging in thematic and conceptual analysis, the study moves beyond descriptive summarization toward integrative theoretical reconstruction. The choice of this design is grounded in its capacity to generate conceptual clarity, identify epistemological patterns, and reveal research gaps within an established body of knowledge. Through systematic

reading, coding, and abstraction, the research constructs a coherent interpretive framework that situates curriculum and instruction as an interconnected and dynamic educational system.

As a theoretical literature-based study, this research does not take place in a physical geographic location but is situated within the academic domain of international educational scholarship. The “location” of the study is therefore defined as peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, and academic databases that publish authoritative works on curriculum theory and instructional studies. Major international indexing platforms such as Scopus, Web of Science, and other reputable academic repositories were prioritized to ensure scholarly rigor and global relevance. The rationale for selecting these sources lies in their quality control mechanisms, citation standards, and contribution to contemporary theoretical debates. By situating the research within internationally recognized academic publications, the study ensures credibility, breadth of perspectives, and engagement with state-of-the-art discourse. This intellectual location enables the research to construct a globally informed theoretical synthesis rather than a contextually limited or region-specific interpretation.

Data in this study consist of conceptual arguments, theoretical propositions, and analytical discussions derived from scholarly publications. The data collection process followed a systematic procedure beginning with keyword identification related to curriculum theory, instructional design, curriculum instruction relationship, and educational philosophy (Firoozeh et al., 2020; Weismayer & Pezenka, 2017). Articles and books were selected based on relevance, academic credibility, and thematic alignment with the research focus. Inclusion criteria emphasized peer-reviewed publications, theoretical significance, and citation impact, while exclusion criteria removed sources lacking scholarly rigor or conceptual relevance. Selected texts were read iteratively to extract core arguments, conceptual categories, and relational patterns between curriculum and instruction. Data were then organized into thematic clusters reflecting normative, structural, and pedagogical dimensions. This systematic and transparent collection process enhances

methodological consistency and ensures that the theoretical synthesis is grounded in credible and diverse scholarly contributions.

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative procedure consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification (Grames et al., 2019; Weismayer & Pezenka, 2017). During data condensation, relevant theoretical arguments were selected, coded, and categorized to reduce conceptual complexity while preserving essential meanings. In the data display phase, thematic matrices and conceptual maps were developed to visualize relationships among normative, design, and pedagogical dimensions. These displays facilitated cross-text comparison and identification of convergent and divergent perspectives. Verification was conducted through iterative re-reading, triangulation across multiple theoretical sources, and continuous refinement of emerging interpretations to ensure internal coherence. To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied criteria of credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Transparent documentation of selection procedures, analytical steps, and interpretive decisions strengthens methodological rigor. Through systematic synthesis and critical reflection, the research ensures that conclusions are logically grounded in the analyzed literature rather than derived from subjective assumption.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Curriculum and Instruction as an Integrated System

Curriculum and Instruction as an Integrated System” is operationally defined in this review as a recursive, co constructive relationship in which curriculum and instruction mutually shape, interpret, and refine one another across normative, structural, and pedagogical dimensions. Within the literature examined, curriculum is not reduced to a formal document outlining objectives and content; rather, it is understood as a value laden framework that embodies philosophical commitments, ideological orientations, and intended learning trajectories. Instruction, in turn, is conceptualized not merely as technical delivery but as pedagogical enactment through which curricular intentions are interpreted, negotiated, and transformed in classroom interaction. The integration becomes observable when instructional

strategies reflect curricular philosophy, assessment practices align with intended outcomes, and classroom discourse reconstructs normative aims. Thus, the operational meaning of integration refers to dynamic reciprocity: curriculum informs instructional design, while instructional practice continuously recontextualizes and reshapes curriculum within lived educational realities.

Table 1. Thematic Synthesis

Excerpt from Reviewed Findings	Indicator	Journal Reviewed
Curriculum objectives require pedagogical interpretation to become meaningful in practice.	Normative–Pedagogical Link	Journal of Curriculum Studies
Instructional strategies reshape the enacted curriculum beyond formal documentation.	Pedagogical Enactment	Teaching and Teacher Education
Alignment between learning outcomes and assessment strengthens systemic coherence.	Design Assessment Integration	Educational Research Review
Classroom interaction mediates ideological dimensions of curriculum.	Normative Mediation	Curriculum Inquiry
Curriculum coherence depends on reciprocal feedback from instructional practice.	Recursive Feedback	Review of Educational Research

The table reveals a consistent pattern across leading journals: curriculum and instruction are conceptualized as interdependent domains rather than hierarchical stages. The first and fourth excerpts highlight the centrality of normative mediation, suggesting that philosophical commitments embedded in curriculum documents only gain substance through instructional interpretation. This indicates that instructional practice functions as a hermeneutic process, translating abstract objectives into situated learning experiences. The second and fifth findings further complicate the linear model by emphasizing recursion; instructional enactment does not merely implement but actively reshapes curriculum. Such arguments challenge the traditional top-down paradigm of curriculum delivery. Meanwhile, the third entry underscores the structural dimension, demonstrating that coherence is reinforced when assessment aligns with intended outcomes. Collectively, these findings suggest that integration operates across values, design, and practice simultaneously, thereby validating the proposed Integrated Curriculum Instruction System Model as theoretically grounded and empirically resonant.

A deeper examination indicates that integration is not automatic but contingent upon reflective alignment mechanisms. The literature suggests that fragmentation

occurs when one dimension dominates others for instance, when assessment drives instruction without reference to normative goals, or when philosophical ideals remain detached from classroom strategies. The journals reviewed converge on the argument that sustainable coherence emerges only through reciprocal feedback loops. Instruction becomes a site of curricular reconstruction, while curriculum provides directionality and ethical orientation for pedagogy. Importantly, several studies imply that teacher agency mediates this relationship, positioning educators as interpretive agents who bridge structural design and classroom enactment. Therefore, integration is best understood as a dynamic ecology rather than a fixed structure. This ecological perspective strengthens the conceptual shift from linear implementation toward systemic reciprocity, reinforcing the argument that curriculum and instruction function as mutually constitutive processes within educational systems.

Through iterative coding and conceptual mapping, the researcher observed that the strongest integrative arguments emerged when authors explicitly linked philosophical aims to pedagogical techniques. Texts that treated curriculum purely as structural planning rarely articulated recursive mechanisms. Conversely, studies grounded in classroom practice frequently demonstrated how instructional decisions reinterpret curriculum in context. This analytical observation confirms that integration becomes visible when theoretical abstraction and pedagogical enactment intersect. The researcher's synthesis indicates that the three dimensions Normative, Design, and Pedagogical-Enactment operate as interconnected layers rather than sequential steps. The recurrence of alignment, mediation, and feedback themes across multiple journals strengthens interpretive confidence. These patterns substantiate the claim that curriculum-instruction integration is supported not by isolated arguments but by convergent theoretical trajectories within international scholarship.

Restating the data, the reviewed literature consistently portrays curriculum and instruction as relational constructs embedded within a systemic framework. Curriculum establishes philosophical direction and structural organization, while instruction animates, interprets, and refines those intentions through pedagogical practice. The dominant pattern across sources is recursive coherence: normative commitments guide design, design structures pedagogical enactment, and enactment

generates feedback that reshapes normative and structural elements. This cyclical movement reflects systemic integration rather than linear implementation. The data display reveals three interwoven strands—value orientation, structural alignment, and pedagogical mediation forming a coherent triadic pattern. Such convergence across journals suggests theoretical maturation in the field, moving beyond dichotomous debates. The descriptive synthesis therefore confirms that the Integrated Curriculum–Instruction System Model captures a prevailing pattern in contemporary educational literature: curriculum and instruction function as a unified, evolving, and co constructive educational system.

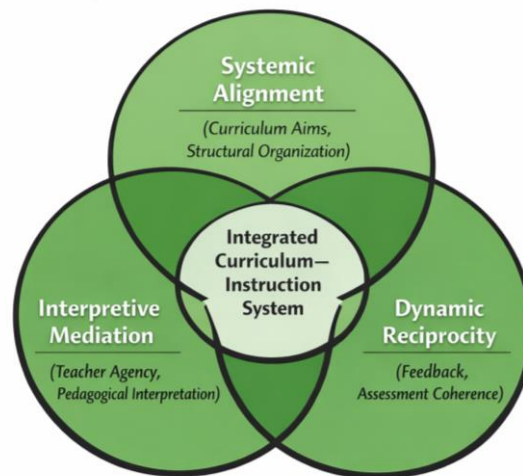
Table 2. Influence Pattern

Journal Reviewed	Summary of Reviewed Findings	Indicator
Journal of Curriculum Studies	Emphasizes conceptual coherence between aims, content, and pedagogy.	Systemic Alignment
Teaching and Teacher Education	Highlights teacher agency in reshaping curriculum through practice.	Interpretive Mediation
Educational Research Review	Demonstrates importance of assessment integration for curriculum effectiveness.	Structural Coherence
Curriculum Inquiry	Explores ideological dimensions embedded in classroom discourse.	Normative Integration
Review of Educational Research	Advocates recursive feedback between policy and practice.	Dynamic Reciprocity

The influence table indicates that leading journals converge around systemic alignment as a foundational principle. Each publication, though emphasizing distinct dimensions, reinforces the interconnectedness of curriculum aims, structural organization, and instructional enactment. Teacher agency emerges as a mediating factor that operationalizes philosophical commitments within classroom realities. This suggests that integration is not solely structural but interpretive.

Furthermore, the journals collectively demonstrate that curriculum reform achieves sustainability only when reciprocal feedback mechanisms are institutionalized. Assessment coherence, ideological mediation, and pedagogical interpretation form a triadic influence pattern. The convergence of these indicators across high-impact publications strengthens the argument that curriculum and instruction should be conceptualized as a dynamic, integrated system rather than discrete administrative and pedagogical domains. The overall pattern shows a tri-dimensional integration model characterized by systemic alignment, interpretive

mediation, and dynamic reciprocity, confirming the theoretical robustness of the Integrated Curriculum–Instruction System Model.



Picture 1. Integrated Curriculum–Instruction Model

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm and extend a growing body of scholarship that challenges the traditional separation between curriculum and instruction. Classical curriculum theory often positioned curriculum as a prior, authoritative framework to be implemented through instruction (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021; Pinar, 2019), whereas instructional research focused on classroom strategies with limited engagement in curricular philosophy. The present synthesis aligns with more recent systemic and constructivist perspectives that emphasize interdependence (Farrell & Newman, 2016; Hay, 2017), yet it advances the debate by articulating a recursive and co constructive model grounded in three integrated dimensions: Normative, Design, and Pedagogical Enactment. Unlike alignment models that maintain a linear logic between intended and implemented curriculum, the current findings demonstrate cyclical reciprocity, where instructional practice reshapes curricular meaning. This distinction is significant because it reframes curriculum not as a fixed blueprint but as an evolving framework continuously interpreted through pedagogical interaction, thereby addressing conceptual gaps identified in prior literature.

In comparison with earlier alignment frameworks, which primarily stressed coherence between objectives, content, and assessment, the Integrated Curriculum

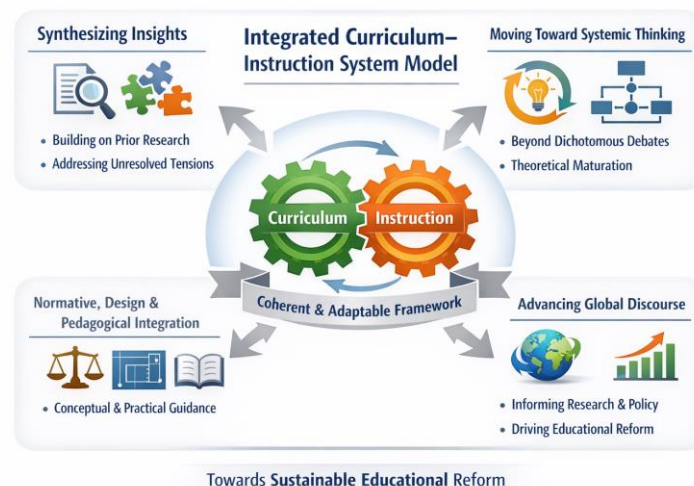
Instruction System Model places stronger emphasis on normative mediation. While previous studies acknowledged philosophical foundations, they rarely analyzed how ideological commitments are enacted and negotiated within classroom discourse. The present findings highlight that values embedded in curriculum documents become operational only through pedagogical enactment and teacher interpretation. This insight partially converges with critical and interpretive traditions but diverges from technocratic models that treat instruction as neutral delivery. By demonstrating that classroom interaction mediates ideological dimensions of curriculum, the study contributes a more comprehensive relational ontology. Consequently, curriculum reform cannot rely solely on structural redesign; it must engage pedagogical processes that translate normative aims into lived educational experiences.

The theoretical implications of these findings are substantial. Conceptually, the study advances curriculum studies by integrating philosophical, structural, and pedagogical domains within a unified systemic architecture. This synthesis responds directly to the research gap identified in the literature, where fragmentation between macro-level curriculum policy and micro-level instructional practice persisted. By proposing recursion as the central organizing principle, the model redefines curriculum instruction relations as dynamic feedback loops rather than hierarchical stages. This theoretical repositioning encourages scholars to examine how values, design decisions, and pedagogical strategies interact simultaneously. Furthermore, the model provides a heuristic framework for future empirical research, enabling investigation of how normative commitments are reconstructed through instructional enactment in diverse educational contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational reform efforts must move beyond document revision and incorporate professional development (Cohen & Mehta, 2017; Datnow, 2020; Harris et al., 2017; Slavin, 2020) that explicitly connects curricular philosophy with instructional strategies (Ariwidodo, 2023; Börekci & Uyangör, 2021; Hussein, 2021). Teachers should be positioned as interpretive agents capable of mediating normative goals through context sensitive pedagogy (Khosronejad et al., 2023; Özdil & Debreli, 2025). Assessment systems should also be designed to reinforce systemic coherence by

aligning with both structural objectives and pedagogical processes. The recursive model implies that feedback from classroom practice should inform curriculum revision (Hamouda et al., 2018; Ilkiw et al., 2017; McGahan, 2018; Miles et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2017), thereby institutionalizing dynamic reciprocity. Educational leaders and policymakers can utilize this framework to design more coherent reform initiatives that bridge policy and practice, reducing fragmentation and enhancing educational quality.

Overall, the discussion reinforces the central argument that curriculum and instruction function as mutually constitutive components of an integrated educational system (Mampaey & Zanoni, 2016; VanTassel-Baska & Wood, 2023; Zhao & Fan, 2023). The findings neither reject prior scholarship nor replicate it; instead, they synthesize convergent insights and address unresolved tensions within the field. By articulating integration across normative, design, and pedagogical dimensions, the study offers both conceptual clarification and actionable guidance. The recursive logic identified across the reviewed literature signals theoretical maturation, indicating a shift from dichotomous debates toward systemic thinking. Consequently, the Integrated Curriculum–Instruction System Model contributes to advancing international discourse by providing a coherent, adaptable, and theoretically grounded framework capable of informing both scholarly inquiry and sustainable educational reform.



Picture 2. Integrated curriculum and instruction model

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is that curriculum and instruction operate as a recursive and co constructive system rather than as a linear chain of

implementation. The research demonstrates that normative commitments, structural design, and pedagogical enactment are dynamically interconnected through continuous feedback loops. The principal lesson derived from this analysis is that educational coherence cannot be achieved through curriculum reform alone; it requires sustained alignment between philosophical values, content organization, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. By reframing instruction as an interpretive and reconstructive process, the study underscores the importance of teacher agency in mediating curricular intentions. This integrative insight challenges technocratic assumptions and highlights the necessity of systemic thinking in educational development. Ultimately, the research affirms that meaningful learning emerges when curriculum and instruction are conceptualized and enacted as mutually constitutive dimensions of a unified educational ecology.

The primary strength of this study lies in its theoretical synthesis and integrative contribution to curriculum scholarship. By systematically reviewing and conceptually mapping diverse strands of international literature, the research advances a coherent Integrated Curriculum–Instruction System Model structured around normative, design, and pedagogical-enactment dimensions. This framework bridges longstanding divides between curriculum theory and instructional research, offering a relational ontology that clarifies their interdependence. The study contributes to academic discourse by moving beyond descriptive alignment models toward a recursive systems perspective, thereby enriching theoretical debates within global educational research. Furthermore, the model provides a conceptual heuristic that can guide empirical investigation and policy analysis. Through rigorous qualitative synthesis, the article strengthens theoretical coherence in the field and offers a foundation for interdisciplinary dialogue on sustainable educational reform and systemic curriculum development.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary data derived from published literature. As a theoretical review, it does not include empirical field validation of the proposed model across specific educational contexts. Interpretations are shaped by the scope of selected sources and may reflect prevailing scholarly trends within indexed international journals. Future research should

empirically test the Integrated Curriculum–Instruction System Model through case studies, comparative analyses, or mixed-method designs to examine how recursive dynamics operate in diverse institutional settings. Longitudinal studies could explore how feedback loops influence curriculum revision over time. Additionally, cross-cultural investigations may reveal contextual variations in normative mediation and pedagogical enactment. Expanding the inquiry beyond theoretical synthesis will strengthen external validity and refine the model's applicability across global educational systems.

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