

From competency-based curriculum to Merdeka curriculum: A bibliometric review of curriculum reform in Indonesia

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Curriculum reform in Indonesia has continuously evolved from the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) to the Merdeka Curriculum in response to educational transformation, technological advancement, and post-pandemic learning challenges. Although numerous studies have discussed curriculum reform in Indonesia, limited research has systematically mapped its intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and research trends using bibliometric approaches. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the development and trends of curriculum reform research in Indonesia.

Materials/methods. This study employed a bibliometric research design using a quantitative descriptive approach. Data were collected from Google Scholar through the Publish or Perish (PoP) application covering publications from 2020–2026. A total of 500 publications were initially retrieved, and 132 relevant publications were selected after the screening process. The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer software.

Results. The findings revealed a significant increase in curriculum reform publications during 2023–2025, with the highest number recorded in 2025 (37.88%) and the lowest in 2020 and 2021 (1.52%). The co-occurrence visualization identified dominant themes related to competency, curriculum, KBK, KTSP, and Merdeka Curriculum, indicating the continuity of curriculum reform discourse in Indonesia. Citation analysis showed that highly influential studies mainly focused on curriculum transformation, educational recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic, and independent learning implementation.

Conclusion. Curriculum reform research in Indonesia continues to evolve toward more flexible, student-centered, and future-oriented educational paradigms. The findings contribute to understanding the intellectual development and thematic trends of curriculum reform research while highlighting future studies on digital curriculum innovation, adaptive learning systems, and artificial intelligence integration in education.

Research Article

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1. Introduction

Curriculum plays a central role in shaping the direction, quality, and objectives of education within a country. As an essential component of educational systems, curriculum development continuously evolves in response to societal transformation, political dynamics, technological advancement, and global educational demands (Abidin et al., 2023; Batubara & Davala, 2023). In the Indonesian context, curriculum reform has become a recurring phenomenon reflecting the government's efforts to improve educational quality and align learning outcomes with national development goals (Insani, 2019; Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021). Since independence, Indonesia has revised its curriculum multiple times, beginning from the 1947 curriculum to the recent Merdeka Curriculum, each carrying distinct educational orientations and policy priorities (Iramdan & Manurung, 2019; Soleman, 2020).

The transformation of curriculum in Indonesia demonstrates a significant shift in educational philosophy and learning paradigms across different periods. The Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) emphasized competency achievement and measurable learning outcomes, while the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) promoted decentralization and school autonomy in curriculum implementation (Muqorrobin & Nisak, 2018; Mustofa & Musri'ah, 2017). Furthermore, the 2013 Curriculum strengthened character education and scientific approaches in classroom learning, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum focuses on flexibility, student autonomy, creativity, and competency development in facing global challenges and the digital era (Kurniaman & Noviana, 2017; Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). These transitions indicate that curriculum reform in Indonesia is not merely administrative change but also reflects broader ideological and pedagogical transformations in education (Muhammedi, 2016; Gumilar et al., 2023).

In recent years, studies related to curriculum reform in Indonesia have increased considerably, covering topics such as curriculum implementation, educational policy, learning innovation, teacher readiness, and curriculum evaluation (Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022; Oktavia et al., 2023). Previous studies predominantly focused on descriptive historical reviews, implementation challenges, or analyses of specific curriculum models within particular educational settings (Alhamuddin et al., 2020; Hidayat et al., 2023). Although these studies provide valuable insights into curriculum development, limited research has systematically mapped the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, research trends, and scholarly collaboration within curriculum reform studies in Indonesia using bibliometric approaches (Abidin et al., 2023; Batubara & Davala, 2023).

Bibliometric analysis has increasingly been recognized as an effective method for identifying publication trends, influential studies, conceptual structures, and emerging themes within a particular field of research (Fărcașiu et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). Through bibliometric visualization and citation analysis, researchers can comprehensively examine the development and direction of scientific knowledge over time. In the context of curriculum reform research in Indonesia, bibliometric studies remain relatively limited, particularly those examining the evolution of curriculum discourse from the Competency-Based Curriculum era to the Merdeka Curriculum era. Consequently, a comprehensive bibliometric review is necessary to understand how curriculum reform research has evolved and how educational priorities have shifted across different curriculum periods (Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022; Pajarwati et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the trends and intellectual development of curriculum reform research in Indonesia through a bibliometric review approach. Specifically, this study investigates publication trends, dominant themes, influential authors, research collaboration patterns, and thematic evolution related to curriculum reform from the Competency-Based Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum era. This study is expected to contribute theoretically by providing a comprehensive mapping of curriculum reform research and practically by offering insights for future educational policy and curriculum development in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

Curriculum reform is a continuous process carried out to align educational systems with societal needs, technological advancement, and national development priorities. In educational theory, curriculum is not only viewed as a learning plan but also as a reflection of educational ideology, policy orientation, and the direction of national human resource development (Muhammedi, 2016; Gultom et al., 2021). In Indonesia, curriculum transformation has experienced significant changes from the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), Curriculum 2013, to the Merdeka Curriculum, each emphasizing different educational paradigms and pedagogical approaches (Muqorrobin & Nisak, 2018; Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). The transition from teacher-centered learning toward student-centered and competency-oriented learning demonstrates the government's efforts to improve educational quality and adapt learning systems to global educational challenges (Kurniaman & Noviana, 2017; Gumilar et al., 2023). Furthermore, recent curriculum reforms increasingly emphasize flexibility, creativity, digital literacy, and independent learning as essential competencies in the era of Society 5.0 and educational digitalization (Marisa, 2021; Li et al., 2023).

In recent years, studies on curriculum reform in Indonesia have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Previous research has primarily focused on historical curriculum development, curriculum policy implementation, educational transformation, and curriculum evaluation in different educational contexts (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021; Oktavia et al., 2023). Several studies also highlighted the relationship between curriculum reform and educational competitiveness, technological adaptation, and character education development in Indonesia (Pajarwati et al., 2021; Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022). However, most existing studies remain descriptive and fragmented, concentrating on specific curriculum periods without systematically examining the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of curriculum reform research over time (Alhamuddin et al., 2020; Hidayat et al., 2023). Therefore, reviewing previous studies is important to identify research trends, theoretical foundations, and existing gaps in curriculum reform studies in Indonesia.

Table 1. Research on curriculum reform in Indonesia.

No	Title	Reference
1	Politics of Education in Curriculum Development Policy in Indonesia from 1947 to 2013: A Documentary Research	Alhamuddin et al. (2020)
2	The Development of Indonesia National Curriculum and Its Changes: The Integrated Science Curriculum Development in Indonesia	Setiawan & Suwandi (2022)
3	Curriculum Development in Indonesia from a Historical Perspective	Abidin et al., (2023)
4	The History of Curriculum in Indonesia: A Literature Study	Oktavia et al. (2023)

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a bibliometric research design using a quantitative descriptive approach to analyze the development and trends of curriculum reform research in Indonesia. Bibliometric analysis was utilized to systematically identify publication trends, dominant themes, citation structures, and research collaborations related to curriculum reform studies from the Competency-Based Curriculum era to the Merdeka Curriculum era (Li et al., 2023; Fărcașiu et al., 2023). In addition, this study incorporated interpretative analysis to explain the thematic evolution and intellectual structure of curriculum reform research within the Indonesian educational context.

3.2 Data Source

The data for this study were collected from Google Scholar using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application as the primary data retrieval tool. A total of 500 relevant publications were obtained and

subsequently exported in RIS and CSV formats to support bibliometric and descriptive analyses. The search process focused on publications related to curriculum reform, curriculum development, Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), Curriculum 2013, and Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Google Scholar was selected because it provides broad coverage of educational publications, including journal articles, conference papers, and scholarly documents relevant to curriculum studies (Abidin et al., 2023; Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022).

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure consisted of several stages, including identification, screening, eligibility checking, and final data selection. The publication search was conducted using several keywords and phrases such as “curriculum reform,” “curriculum development,” “Merdeka Curriculum,” “Curriculum 2013,” “KTSP,” and “Competency-Based Curriculum” combined with the term “Indonesia.” After the initial retrieval process, duplicated and irrelevant documents were removed through manual screening to ensure the relevance of the dataset to the research objectives. The selected publications were then organized and prepared for bibliometric visualization and descriptive analysis using RIS and CSV data formats.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and VOSviewer software to generate bibliometric visualizations and descriptive statistical findings. Microsoft Excel was used to analyze publication trends, citation frequencies, and document distribution, while VOSviewer was utilized to map co-occurrence keywords, co-authorship networks, thematic clusters, overlay visualization, and research density patterns. The analysis focused on identifying dominant research themes, intellectual relationships among studies, and thematic evolution in curriculum reform research in Indonesia from the Competency-Based Curriculum era to the Merdeka Curriculum era.

4. Results

4.1. Curriculum Reform Research in Indonesia 2020–2026

Table 1 and Figure 1 present the annual distribution of publications related to curriculum reform research in Indonesia indexed through Google Scholar and retrieved using the Publish or Perish application during the period 2020–2026. A total of 132 publications were identified and analysed in this study. The findings indicate fluctuations in publication trends across the observed years.

Based on Table 1, the number of publications remained relatively low during 2020–2022, with only 2 publications in 2020, 2 publications in 2021, and 4 publications in 2022. However, a substantial increase occurred in 2023 with 31 publications (23.48%), followed by 32 publications in 2024 (24.24%). The highest number of publications was recorded in 2025 with 50 documents (37.88%), while 11 publications (8.33%) were identified in 2026 during the data collection period.

Table 1. Annual report research on curriculum reform in Indonesia.

No	Years	Documents	Percentages
1	2020	2	1,52%
2	2021	2	1,52%
3	2022	4	3,03%
4	2023	31	23,48%
5	2024	32	24,24%
6	2025	50	37,88%
7	2026	11	8,33%
Total		320	100%

Source: Research Data (2026)

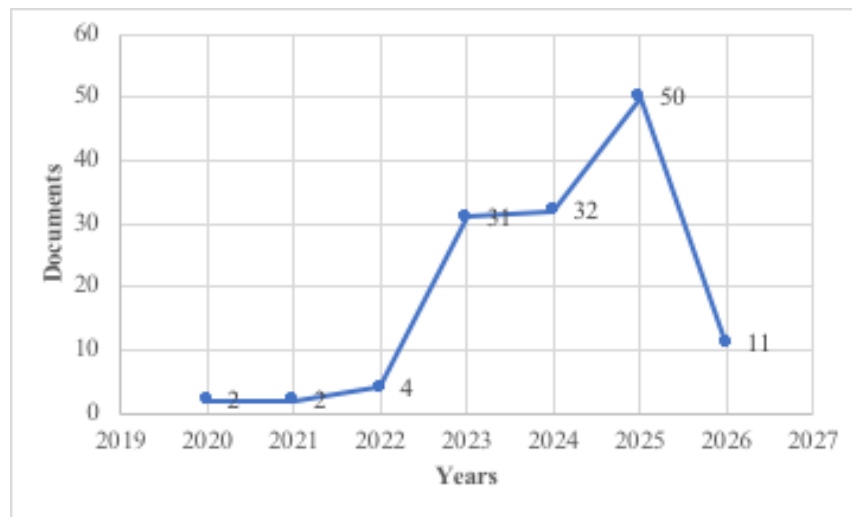


Figure 1. Annual report of publications

4.2. Most Influential and Highly Cited Publications

Table 2 presents the most influential and highly cited publications related to curriculum reform research in Indonesia retrieved from Google Scholar through the Publish or Perish application. Citation analysis was conducted to identify publications that have contributed significantly to the development of curriculum reform discourse in Indonesian education. The results show that several highly cited publications mainly focused on the Merdeka Curriculum, curriculum transformation, curriculum development, educational reform, and competency improvement in education.

Based on Table 2, the article entitled “Merdeka Curriculum: Characteristics and Potential in Education Recovery after the COVID-19 Pandemic” published in 2023 obtained the highest number of citations with 95 citations and 31.67 citations per year. This was followed by “Curriculum Development in Indonesia from a Historical Perspective” with 77 citations and “Curriculum Reform in Indonesia: From Competency-Based to Freedom of Learning” with 55 citations. Furthermore, several recent publications published in 2025 also demonstrated considerable citation impact, indicating the growing academic interest in curriculum reform, educational innovation, and independent learning implementation in Indonesia.

Table 3. Most cited articles on curriculum reform research in Indonesia.

No	Cites	Title	Year	Cites Per Year	Ref.
1	95	Merdeka Curriculum: Characteristics and Potential in Education Recovery after the COVID-19 Pandemic.	2023	31.67	Rizaldi & Fatimah (2023)
2	77	Curriculum development in Indonesia from a historical perspective	2023	25.67	Abidin et al. (2023)
3	55	Curriculum reform in indonesia: from competency-based to freedom of learning	2023	18.33	Simarmata & Mayuni (2023)
4	54	The role of islamic education teachers competency in improving the quality of education	2020	09.00	Zuhaeriah et al. (2020)
5	47	Evolution of the education curriculum in Indonesia	2025	47.00.00	Hidayat et al. (2025)
6	42	Curriculum changes in Indonesia: Implementation and its challenges in religious institutions	2025	42.00.00	Laila et al. (2025)
7	38	Approaches and models development of 2013 curriculum and merdeka curriculum	2022	09.50	Azzahra et al. (2022)

No	Cites	Title	Year	Cites Per Year	Ref.
8	35	Education for sustainable development (esd): a systematic literature review on curriculum development strategy design	2023	0,50486111	Thoriq & Mahmudah (2023)
9	32	Management of the Independent Learning Curriculum during the Covid-19 Pandemic	2021	06.40	Istaryaningtyas et al. (2021)
10	20	Analysis of educational curriculum evolution in Indonesia and its impact on increasing education quality	2023	0,29652778	Jannah (2023)
11	15	Examining emancipated curriculum development in middle schools: A case study	2023	05.00	Ellen & Sudimantara (2023)
12	15	Synergizing Science and Spirituality: Crafting an Integrated Curriculum to Elevate Spiritual Intelligence in Madrasah Education	2023	05.00	Rifai et al. (2023)
13	14	Curriculum innovation at SMK PGRI 2 Cimahi: Preparing students for the workforce	2025	14.00	Triani et al. (2025)
14	13	Comparative Study of Levels and Curriculum in Education Systems of Indonesia and Australia	2024	06.50	Bahri et al. (2024)
15	12	Analisis kebijakan otonomi pendidikan di Indonesia: Analysis of Education Autonomy Policy in Indonesia	2022	03.00	Afandi et al. (2022)
16	12	University Leaders' Views on Independent Campus Curriculum as Educational Reforms in Indonesian Islamic Universities.	2024	06.00	Nasir (2024)

4.3. Visualization of Research Data Mapping of Curriculum Reform Research

Figure 2 presents the network visualization based on the co-occurrence of terms related to curriculum reform research in Indonesia using VOSviewer. The minimum occurrence threshold was set at 10 occurrences. From a total of 664 identified terms, 13 terms met the minimum threshold requirement. Subsequently, VOSviewer automatically calculated the relevance score and selected the most relevant terms, resulting in 8 interconnected terms included in the final visualization network.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the visualization network is divided into two main clusters. The first cluster (red), consisting of five items, includes competency, curriculum, KBK, KTSP, and Merdeka Curriculum. This cluster primarily reflects the historical transformation and development of curriculum reform in Indonesia from competency-based approaches toward independent and flexible learning paradigms. Meanwhile, the second cluster (green), comprising three items, includes education, Indonesia, and Kurikulum Merdeka, representing the broader educational context and national orientation of curriculum reform studies in Indonesia.

The co-occurrence network demonstrates that the term curriculum occupies the central position within the visualization, indicating its dominant role and strong relationship with other curriculum-related themes. In addition, the presence of terms such as KBK, KTSP, and Merdeka Curriculum suggests that curriculum reform research in Indonesia remains strongly connected to the evolution of national educational policies and learning transformation across different curriculum eras.

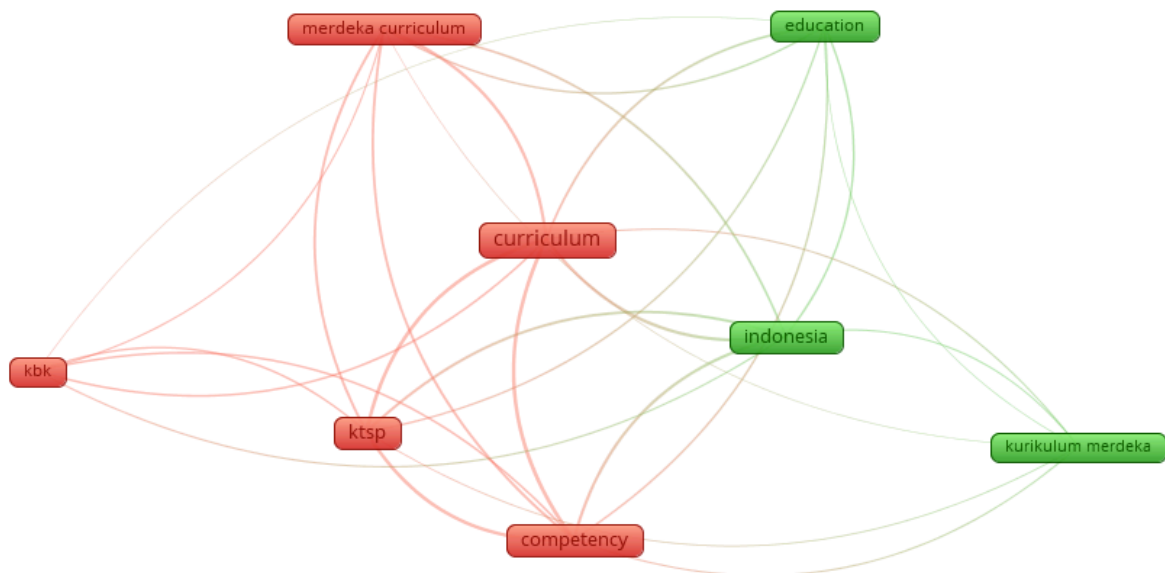


Figure 2. Network visualization based on co-occurrence of terms.

The overlay visualization presented in Figure 3 illustrates the temporal distribution of research themes related to curriculum reform in Indonesia. The visualization indicates that earlier studies were primarily associated with terms such as KBK and KTSP, while more recent publications increasingly focused on Merdeka Curriculum and broader curriculum transformation themes. This trend demonstrates the shifting orientation of curriculum reform research toward independent learning, educational flexibility, and contemporary educational policies in Indonesia.

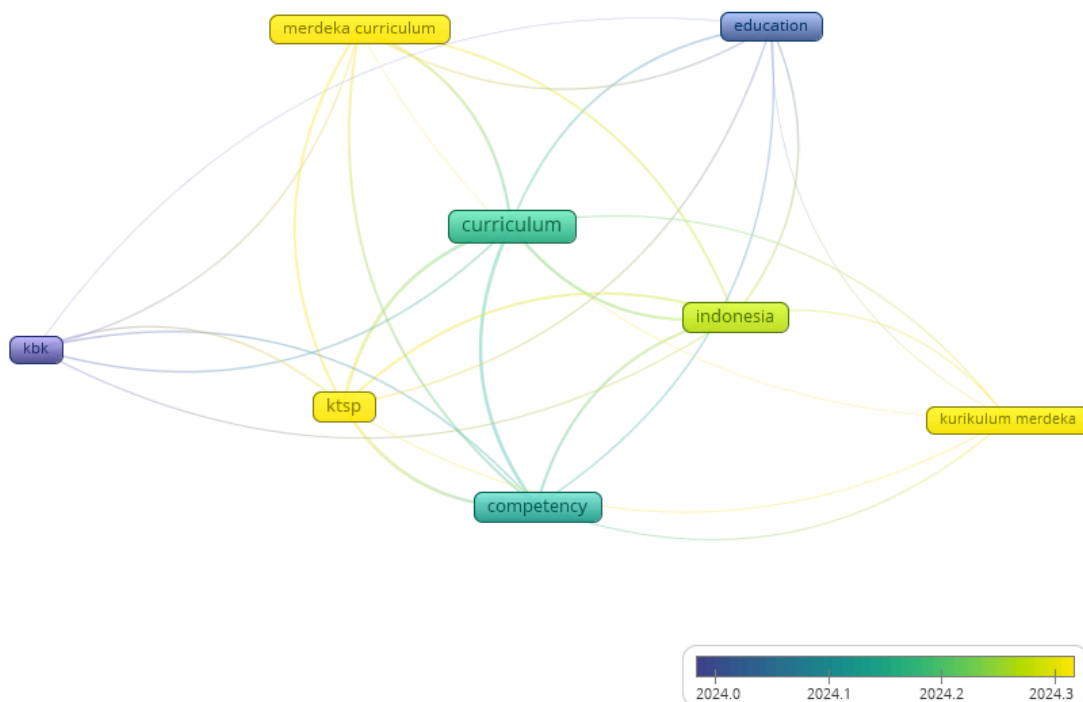


Figure 3. Overlay visualization based on co-occurrence of terms.

Furthermore, the density visualization shown in Figure 4 demonstrates the intensity and frequency of term occurrences within the research dataset. The term curriculum appears as the most dominant and densely connected keyword, indicating its central role in the research landscape. Other terms such as competency, KTSP, and Merdeka Curriculum also show considerable density levels, suggesting that curriculum transformation and competency-oriented learning remain major concerns in curriculum reform research in Indonesia.

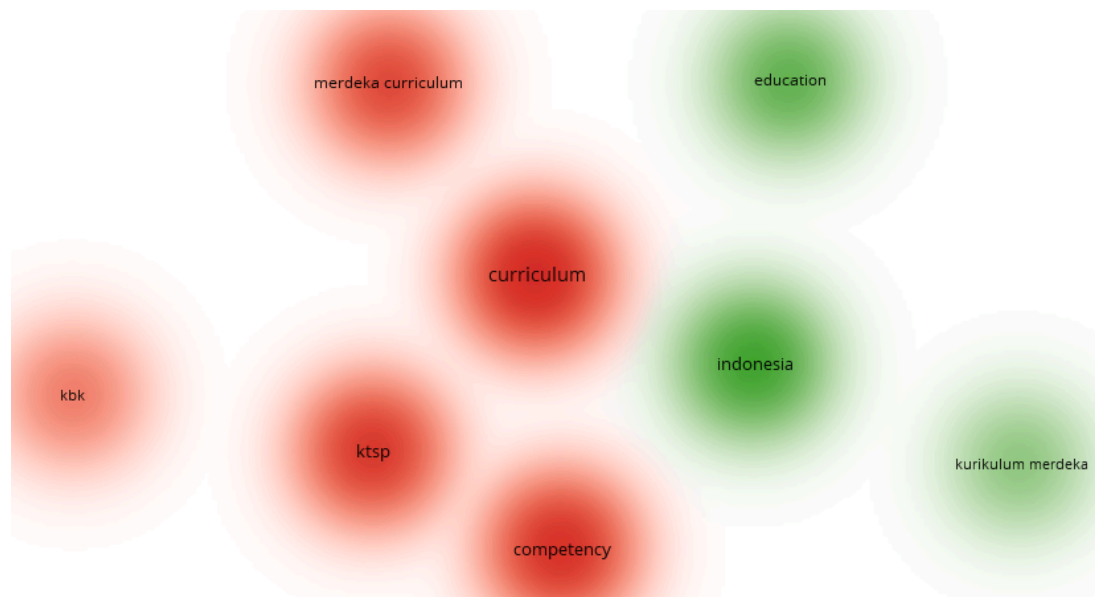


Figure 4. Density visualization based on the co-occurrence of terms.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that curriculum reform research in Indonesia has experienced a substantial increase, particularly during the period 2023–2025. This trend indicates that curriculum transformation has become one of the dominant issues in Indonesian educational discourse, especially following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the acceleration of educational change after the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous studies similarly emphasized that curriculum reform in Indonesia is continuously shaped by educational policy transformation, globalization, technological development, and the increasing demand for adaptive learning systems (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022; Abidin et al., 2023). The rapid growth of publications identified in this study also reflects the increasing academic concern regarding educational flexibility, competency development, independent learning, and curriculum adaptation within contemporary Indonesian education (Marisa, 2021; Simarmata & Mayuni, 2023). These findings suggest that curriculum reform is no longer viewed merely as administrative policy revision, but rather as a broader educational transformation involving pedagogical, ideological, and technological dimensions.

The co-occurrence visualization further reveals that the dominant research themes remain strongly connected to competency, curriculum, KBK, KTSP, and Merdeka Curriculum. This finding demonstrates the continuity of curriculum discourse in Indonesia from competency-oriented approaches toward more flexible and student-centered educational paradigms. Historically, the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) emphasized measurable learning outcomes and competency achievement, while KTSP introduced decentralization and school autonomy in curriculum implementation (Muqorrobin & Nisak, 2018; Afandi et al., 2022). Subsequently, Curriculum 2013 strengthened character education and scientific learning approaches, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum increasingly prioritizes creativity, flexibility, differentiation, and learner autonomy (Kurniaman & Noviana, 2017; Gumilar et al., 2023). The visualization mapping generated in this study confirms that curriculum reform research in Indonesia evolves in line with national educational policy changes and broader shifts in educational philosophy.

Another important finding is the relatively limited diversity of dominant keywords within the visualization network. Although only a small number of terms met the minimum occurrence threshold, the identified keywords formed a highly interconnected and conceptually coherent network. This indicates that curriculum reform research in Indonesia remains concentrated around several core themes rather than fragmented into highly diverse subtopics. In bibliometric studies, a focused keyword structure may indicate the existence of a strong intellectual concentration within a particular field of study (Fărcașiu et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). In this study, the dominance of terms such as curriculum, competency, and Merdeka Curriculum suggests that Indonesian curriculum

research continues to prioritize discussions on educational transformation, competency-based learning, and policy implementation. However, the relatively limited emergence of themes related to artificial intelligence, digital curriculum innovation, adaptive learning systems, and global educational competitiveness also indicates potential research gaps that require further scholarly attention.

The citation analysis additionally reveals that the most influential publications predominantly discuss the Merdeka Curriculum, curriculum transformation, and educational recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. This trend indicates that recent curriculum reform research is strongly influenced by post-pandemic educational challenges and the government's efforts to redesign learning systems in response to rapid social and technological changes (Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2023; Istaryaningtyas et al., 2021). Moreover, highly cited studies discussing curriculum evolution and freedom of learning demonstrate that curriculum reform research increasingly emphasizes learner autonomy, educational innovation, and competency-oriented learning approaches (Hidayat et al., 2025; Simarmata & Mayuni, 2023). These findings align with global educational trends that encourage more flexible, personalized, and future-oriented curriculum models in preparing students for the challenges of the digital era and Society 5.0.

From a broader perspective, the findings of this study imply that curriculum reform in Indonesia reflects not only educational policy shifts but also ideological transformation within the national education system. The transition from centralized curriculum structures toward independent and flexible learning paradigms indicates a significant change in how education conceptualizes knowledge, learning processes, teacher roles, and student participation. Previous studies argued that curriculum transformation in Indonesia increasingly positions students as active learners and emphasizes competency integration, creativity, critical thinking, and contextual learning experiences (Setiawan & Suwandi, 2022; Oktavia et al., 2023). Therefore, curriculum reform should not merely focus on revising curriculum documents but also consider teacher readiness, educational infrastructure, digital literacy, and sustainable policy implementation to ensure effective educational transformation.

The findings of this study also contribute theoretically and practically to curriculum reform literature in Indonesia. Theoretically, this study provides a comprehensive bibliometric mapping that reveals the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and research trends of curriculum reform studies in Indonesia from the KBK era to the Merdeka Curriculum era. Practically, the findings may serve as references for researchers, policymakers, and educational institutions in understanding emerging research directions and future curriculum priorities. Furthermore, this study highlights the necessity for future curriculum research to explore underrepresented themes such as artificial intelligence integration in curriculum design, adaptive curriculum systems, digital competency frameworks, and interdisciplinary curriculum innovation to support future-ready education in Indonesia.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that curriculum reform research in Indonesia has experienced significant growth, particularly during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and post-pandemic educational transformation. The bibliometric findings reveal that curriculum research in Indonesia is primarily focused on themes related to competency-based learning, curriculum transformation, educational policy, and independent learning paradigms. In addition, the visualization analysis indicates that curriculum reform research has evolved from competency-oriented approaches toward more flexible, student-centered, and future-oriented educational frameworks in Indonesian education.

7. Suggestion

The findings of this study suggest the need for future curriculum reform research to explore emerging themes such as artificial intelligence integration, adaptive curriculum systems, digital competency development, and innovative curriculum models in education. In addition, researchers are encouraged to conduct broader bibliometric studies using international databases and comparative perspectives to enrich the understanding of curriculum transformation in both national and global

educational contexts. Furthermore, policymakers and educational institutions should strengthen curriculum implementation strategies, teacher readiness, and digital learning support systems to ensure sustainable educational transformation in Indonesia.

Declarations

Author Contributions. S.: Literature review, conceptualization, methodology, data analysis. F.S.: review-editing, original manuscript preparation. All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding. This research received no external funding.

Ethical Approval. Ethical approval was not required for this study because the research utilised publicly accessible bibliographic data obtained from Google Scholar through the Publish or Perish application and did not involve human participants.

Data Availability Statement. The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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