



## Curriculum Development Strategies in Five Countries: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to investigate curriculum development strategies in five countries—Finland, Indonesia, the United States, Japan, and Singapore—through a qualitative library research approach. Curriculum reform has become a global priority in response to rapid technological advancement, globalization, and changing educational demands. This study reviews 50 scholarly sources, consisting of 10 references for each country, including journal articles, policy documents, and official government reports. The analysis focuses on key aspects of curriculum development, namely governance structure, curriculum orientation, teacher autonomy, assessment practices, and technology integration. The findings indicate that while all five countries emphasize competency-based learning and the integration of technology to improve learning quality, they differ significantly in curriculum governance, flexibility, and implementation strategies. Finland and the United States demonstrate higher levels of decentralization and teacher autonomy, whereas Indonesia, Japan, and Singapore apply more centralized curriculum systems. Common challenges identified include ensuring educational equity, enhancing teacher readiness, and adapting curricula to rapid societal and technological changes. This study contributes to a comparative understanding of international curriculum strategies and provides insights for improving curriculum design through evidence-based and technology-supported approaches.*

**Keywords:** *Curriculum Development Strategy; Comparative Education; Finland; Indonesia; United States.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In order to improve student skills and educational quality in reaction to social, economic, and technological changes, curriculum development is crucial. Globalization, the digital revolution, and the rapid spread of information have forced educational institutions worldwide to constantly update their curricula in the twenty-first century. Different approaches are used in curriculum design throughout nations, which are impacted by national interests, cultural values, governmental systems, and educational philosophies. Finland, the United States, Japan, Singapore, and Indonesia use a variety of curriculum design strategies that are affected by their national interests, educational philosophies, political systems, and cultural values.

Finland is recognized for its learner-focused, trust-based curriculum and minimal standardized testing. In Finland, curriculum transformation has been influenced by worldwide educational trends that emphasize 21st-century skills like critical thinking, adaptability, and creativity. The adaptable and interdisciplinary aspects of the curriculum allow students to link academic understanding with practical situations, thus enhancing significance and student independence. This trust-focused system places teachers in the roles of curriculum developers and researchers, bolstered by thorough professional training at the master's level, which guarantees the effective implementation of the curriculum (Cahyani, 2023). In contrast, to

handle national diversity, Indonesia uses a centralized curricular structure that becomes increasingly adaptable over time. To align national standards with various institutional and societal contexts, the Indonesian education system is actively working to develop a customized Operational Curriculum (KUR). Relevance and facilitating technology implementation are two key objectives of this effort. Two main goals of this initiative are relevance and the facilitation of technology implementation. Activity Centers (PKBM) should integrate local wisdom as the foundation of their curriculum to ensure relevance and preserve regional values (Sastrawijaya et al., 2023).

The United States has a decentralized curriculum system shaped by federal mandates and state authority. According to Syakhrani et al., (2022) The key approach of decentralization, mirroring the traits of the US federal government, is the basis of the nation's education system. For numerous years, education policy has predominantly been the responsibility of state and local or district governments. Although each state's Department of Education was granted complete control and accountability for daily policies, the federal government, via its Department of Education located in Washington, D.C., served merely as an overarching regulator. Conversely, a structured national curriculum in Japan focuses on moral education, discipline, and fostering a sense of national identity. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) plays a dominant role in regulating curriculum standards, ensuring coherence and alignment with national goals. However, schools are still permitted limited flexibility to adapt curricular content to local conditions, particularly following policy recommendations introduced in the late 1990s (Sepdiane & Novitasari, 2025).

Singapore adopts a highly centralized, forward-looking curriculum that prioritizes global competitiveness, technological integration, and skill enhancement. The national curriculum is carefully coordinated with the nation's long-term development plans, highlighting bilingual education, innovation, and proficiency in skills. English serves as the primary language of instruction, whereas native languages are upheld to preserve cultural identity and promote social unity. Consequently, education is considered the main factor for the survival and advancement of a nation. Curriculum reforms such as *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* and *Teach Less, Learn More* were introduced to shift instructional focus from content overload to critical thinking, creativity, and deep understanding. These initiatives reflect Singapore's commitment to preparing learners for a rapidly changing, technology-driven global environment (Putri et al., 2025). Singapore employs a highly centralized curriculum focused on the future, prioritizing global competitiveness, technology integration, and skill enhancement. The national curriculum is consistently aligned with the nation's long-term

developmental plans, focusing on bilingual education, innovation, and mastery of skills. English serves as the primary language of instruction, while native languages are retained to uphold cultural identity and social unity. Consequently, education is seen as the essential force behind national endurance and advancement.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- a. How are curriculum development strategies designed and implemented in Finland, Indonesia, the United States, Japan, and Singapore?
- b. What similarities and differences exist among the curriculum strategies of these five countries?
- c. What challenges are commonly faced in curriculum development across these countries?

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

- a. To investigate curriculum development strategies in five countries: Finland, Indonesia, the United States, Japan, and Singapore.
- b. To compare similarities and differences in curriculum organization and development strategies.
- c. To critically analyze curriculum strategies to improve learning quality through literature-based research and the use of information technology.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative research design that includes library research. The data were gathered from scholarly journal articles, books, policy papers, and government reports on curriculum development in the five selected nations. A total of 50 sources were analyzed, with 10 sources each nation. The analytical procedure included; First, choosing reputable and relevant material produced by governments, international organizations, and educational scholars. Second, curriculum strategies are classified depending on essential characteristics such as governance, curriculum structure, learning focus, assessment, and technological integration. The last is comparing and synthesizing results from many nations to detect trends, similarities, and differences. This comparative literature review methodology enables a critical analysis of curriculum strategies and their implications for increasing educational quality.

## **3. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

## Indonesia

According to Yanuar, (2021) every country is committed to improving the quality of its citizens so that they are ready to face the future. Improving the quality of education in a country is one way to achieve this goal. The success of national education depends on the curriculum based on Rohimah et al., (1907). Therefore, The curriculum development strategies for the Education Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP) and the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM) under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum are compared across three dimensions: The Conceptual Development Model, The Practical Implementation Strategy, and The Curriculum's Specific Focus.

### *a. Comparison by Conceptual Development Model*

The strategies differ in the fundamental theoretical frameworks used to guide the curriculum's creation:

- One strategy employs a systematic Curriculum Management Model which details the KOSP compilation process through the functions of Planning, Organizing, Implementing, and Evaluating (P-O-I-E) to ensure adherence to established principles and components (Syukri et al., 2023).
- For Senior High Schools (SMA), the strategy applies a Hybrid Development Model (Administrative and Grass-Roots), which maintains compliance with central government procedures while prioritizing a local, grass-roots focus on integrating Yogyakarta culture and environmental awareness into every program (Faiz & Susilo, 2025).
- In the context of non-formal education (PKBM), the chosen strategy is a structured Research & Development (R&D) Model (4D), systematically utilized to produce an Operational Curriculum specifically anchored in Local Wisdom to counteract the degradation of local and national values (Sastrawijaya et al., 2023).

***b. Comparison by Practical Implementation Strategy***

These strategies are also differentiated by the practical methods used to enable teachers and institutions to successfully compile the curriculum:

- The most prevalent practical strategy identified is Training and Mentoring, which is deemed crucial for addressing the biggest challenge of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation: teacher mindset and readiness (Hasibuan et al., 2023).
- A distinct implementation strategy is Targeted Assistance for Driving Schools, where direct, hands-on support is provided to ensure the resulting KOSP accurately reflects the school's unique characteristics and fully internalizes the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) (Sumandya et al., 2022).
- For Islamic schools, the specific preparation method is Mentoring for the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM), aimed at providing the necessary knowledge and guidance to align the KOM with the Merdeka Curriculum framework and religious education objectives (Mahmudah, 2023).

***c. Comparison by Curriculum Focus and Characteristics***

The final point of comparison is the substantive content that is prioritized by the strategy during the curriculum's development:

- In certain Early Childhood Education (PAUD) Islamic institutions, the management strategy focuses on the systematic Integration of Supplementary Islamic Religious Material into the annual and weekly operational plans alongside the national curriculum content (Rohimah et al., 1907).
- As a key output of the R&D model, the curriculum for Equality Education (PKBM) is strategically focused on making Local Wisdom the operational foundation for learning, directly serving as a mechanism to counter the erosion of local values (Sastrawijaya et al., 2023).

**United States (US)**

According to Syakhrani et al., (2022) The findings indicate that, in contrast to countries with centralized systems, U.S. educational policy adopts a distinct method. As a democracy, the US restricts federal engagement in education through decentralization, allowing state

governments and local school districts greater authority over educational matters. State Boards of Education and superintendents develop policies related to curriculum design, educational organization, teacher certification, and school financing, while the federal government, via the Department of Education, primarily acts as an overarching regulator. Variations from state to state can be found in the primary and secondary education systems of the United States, which encompass kindergarten to upper secondary education and, in some states, incorporate junior or community colleges within secondary education. The nation's humanity perspective approach to education is reflected in the development of educational management, which is focused on the needs and goals of local communities. Raising graduation requirements, implementing standardized testing to gauge student achievement, bolstering teacher evaluation systems in line with career development, and increasing state-level funding for schools—particularly to raise teacher salaries—are just a few of the educational reforms the US has implemented since the 1990s in an effort to improve quality. During Bill Clinton's presidency, these innovations were widely acknowledged and have made a substantial contribution to the advancement of education nationwide.

### **Singapore**

The findings indicate that Singapore implements a highly centralized yet adaptive curriculum development strategy that is closely aligned with national economic goals, global competitiveness, and future workforce demands. As observed by Meijustika et al., (2024), the system is characterized by high standards and a strong orientation toward technological innovation. This is achieved through a unique balance of centralized governance and institutional flexibility. Curriculum development in Singapore is centrally regulated by the Ministry of Education (MOE); however, schools are granted increasing levels of autonomy to adapt instructional approaches in response to students' diverse needs through applied and differentiated pathways (Syakrani et al., 2022).

According to Syakrani et al., (2022) One of the most significant strategies underpinning Singapore's curriculum development is the implementation of long-term systemic reforms, particularly the Thinking Schools, Learning Nation (TSLN) vision. This reform reoriented curriculum design from content-heavy instruction toward the cultivation of critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning habits. The curriculum framework emphasizes explicit teaching of higher-order thinking skills, a reduction of overloaded subject content, revised assessment models, and a stronger focus on learning processes rather than solely on outcomes.

Further curriculum innovation is reflected in the Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM) policy, According to Fangestu et al., (2025), this policy empowers educators to reduce excessive

curricular bulk, allowing for deeper conceptual engagement and a more student-centered pedagogical approach. Within this framework, educators are anticipated to participate in thoughtful teaching practices and create significant learning experiences instead of just presenting mandated content. This approach showcases Singapore's transition to a curriculum focus that prioritizes students and emphasizes values (Sholihah et al., 2024).

In terms of structural design, Singapore's curriculum is characterized by flexible learning pathways, particularly at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Schools are permitted to offer Applied Grade Subjects (AGS) as alternatives or complements to academic tracks, enabling students to pursue vocationally oriented or practice-based learning aligned with their interests and abilities. This approach reflects a strategic balance between academic excellence and employability skills development (Syakrani et al., 2022).

Technological integration also plays a crucial role in curriculum development. Singapore systematically embeds digital infrastructure within curriculum implementation, supported by nationwide access to internet-enabled classrooms, digital learning platforms, and school-based websites that facilitate communication among teachers, students, and parents. This technological readiness enhances curriculum relevance and supports innovation-driven learning environments (Sholihah et al., 2024).

Moreover, curriculum quality in Singapore is reinforced by strong human resource policies, particularly in teacher recruitment and professional development. The highly selective teacher education system ensures that only qualified candidates enter the profession, followed by intensive pre-service training. Competitive remuneration and continuous professional development further enable teachers to effectively implement curriculum reforms and innovative pedagogical practices (Sholihah et al., 2024).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Singapore's curriculum development strategy is characterized by centralized governance combined with institutional flexibility, strong alignment with national development agendas, systematic curriculum reform, and robust technological and human resource support. These integrated strategies have enabled Singapore to maintain curriculum relevance while continuously adapting to global educational challenges.

## **Finland**

Research shows that the way the curriculum is structured in Finland relies on a well-organized decentralized model, creating a balance between national standards and local freedom. The core of this approach is a clear but interrelated division of tasks; the Finnish National Board of Education (NBE) is responsible for developing the National Core Curriculum as a framework document that covers the main objectives, evaluation principles, and core learning modules for each subject (Haryanto, 2020). However, the framework is not too strict. Rather, it gives city governments and educational institutions freedom to develop local curricula tailored to each region's unique needs. Teachers, schools, and city governments are entirely responsible for developing the operational curriculum, which has shifted the central government's role from regulatory to providing guidance (Suyono et al., 2023).

The Finnish curriculum is designed with a high degree of flexibility that prioritizes the comfort and individual needs of students. Based on (Adha et al., 2019) At the primary level, they implement a nine-year unified system to ensure continuity in education and ease the challenges encountered when moving between school stages. The high school program is structured in a modular format and lacks strict grade divisions. This enables students to design their own study plans and integrate general subjects with vocational ones based on their preferences. According to (Suyono et al., 2023) In line with the motto “Test Less Learn More,” integrated curriculum evaluation strategies also place greater emphasis on the learning process and formative assessment rather than the burden of national exams or excessive homework.

The curriculum development strategy in Finland relies heavily on the high degree of autonomy given to educators. Unlike many countries that view teachers as mere implementers of instructions, in Finland teachers are regarded as curriculum developers and practical researchers (Haryanto, 2020). Curriculum planning is considered a shared responsibility at the elementary level, involving teachers, principals, and local authorities, rather than simply being dictated by the central government. This is supported by the elimination of old control methods such as school inspections or standardized national exams. Finland prefers a trust-based supervision approach that encourages transparency and constructive communication between all parties involved. This collaborative approach not only increases teachers' sense of ownership of the curriculum, but also ensures that every decision made is based on research and field experience. By combining a strong national vision of equity and independent local implementation, this strategy has succeeded in creating an education system that is capable of producing consistent quality learning across all regions (Suyono et al., 2023).

## **Japan**

According to (Ni Wayan Risna Dewi et al, 2023) Japan is known as one countries with the best education system in Asia, and even has a significant global impact. The education system in Japan has generated high-caliber and extremely competitive human resources. In Japan, the education system is overseen by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) based on (Irawati Hani & Maulidiyah Ayu, 2022). The strategy for curriculum Japan is characterized by a stable, centralized framework focused on achieving balanced educational goals, as a consistently highlighted in various comparative studies.

Structurally, the Japanese educational program is administered via its main strategic framework: the "Course of Study" (National Curriculum). The successful execution and amendment of this national curriculum are recognized as crucial elements that enhance the strong performance of the Japanese education system, especially in global evaluations such as PISA (Dewi, Windayani, Laia, Natiasih, and Riastini, 2023). The national education system itself globally recognized for being standardized and stable, making its framework a consistent benchmark for developing nations (Jitu, Fitri, Fitriani, & Ahmad, 2025).

The curriculum's core philosophy revolves around a strategic equilibrium. The Japanese National Curriculum explicitly centers on fostering a well-balanced personality in students, which is achieved through the integrated delivery of moral, social, and academic education (Jitu, Fitri, Fitriani, & Ahmad, 2025; Andriya, Fadila, & Andriani, 2025). This balance is regarded as the foundation for the nation's societal progress, cultivated through sustained character education from the elementary level onwards (Ansori & Sassi, 2024).

The method used to implement these core values are a defining feature of the Japanese strategy. Moral education is not treated as a separate subject but is strategically integrated into every subject taught (Ansori & Sassi, 2024). The prevalence of moral education in classroom activities is highly noticeable (Yanuar, 2021; Nurhayati, Andini, & Mutharom, 2023). Specifically, the elementary school curriculum prioritizes the moral aspect and actively implements self-reliance (independence) in students, and is also strategically designed to ensure students have a comprehensive understanding of disaster mitigation (Irawati & Maulidiyah, 2022).

In the context of international comparative research, Japan's curriculum development strategy frequently serves as a reference model. Other countries, such as Indonesia, explicitly study Japan's methods for implementing and designing classroom curriculum (Yanuar, 2021; Nurhayati, Andini, & Mutharom, 2023). These comparisons generally analyze four key aspects—educational policies, learning methods, curriculum structure, and character development—to draw lessons regarding the consistency of curriculum execution and the deep

integration of social values into the education process (Dewi, Windayani, Laia, Nitiasih, & Riastini, 2023; Jitu, Fitri, Fitriani, & Ahmad, 2025).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Curriculum development strategies in Indonesia, the United States, Singapore, Finland, and Japan demonstrate both significant diversity and notable convergence, shaped by each country's educational philosophy, governance structure, cultural values, and national priorities. Although all five countries share a common objective of improving educational quality and preparing students to face future global challenges, they adopt distinct strategic approaches in curriculum design and implementation.

Indonesia's curriculum development strategy under the Merdeka Curriculum reflects a transitional model that combines centralized policy direction with increasing institutional autonomy. Through the Education Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP) and Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM), Indonesia emphasizes contextualization, local wisdom, and teacher empowerment. However, the findings reveal that the success of this strategy is highly dependent on continuous training, mentoring, and teacher readiness, indicating that human resource capacity remains a critical challenge.

The United States represents a contrasting model characterized by strong decentralization. Curriculum authority is largely delegated to state and local governments, allowing education systems to respond directly to community needs and local priorities. This approach reflects democratic values and local accountability, yet it also results in significant variation in curriculum standards and educational outcomes across states, highlighting ongoing challenges related to equity and consistency.

Singapore demonstrates a highly centralized yet adaptive curriculum development strategy. Strong government control ensures coherence and alignment with national economic and workforce goals, while institutional flexibility enables differentiated learning pathways and innovation. Long-term reforms such as *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* and *Teach Less, Learn More* illustrate Singapore's strategic shift toward critical thinking, technological integration, and skills-based education. The findings indicate that Singapore's success is strongly supported by systematic teacher development and robust technological infrastructure.

Finland's curriculum development strategy is distinguished by its decentralized, trust-based model. National guidelines provide a clear framework, while local governments, schools, and teachers are granted substantial autonomy to design and implement curricula. Teachers function not only as implementers but also as curriculum developers and researchers. This high

level of professional trust, combined with minimal standardized testing, has enabled Finland to achieve educational equity and consistent learning quality across regions.

Japan's curriculum development strategy reflects a stable and centralized framework rooted in moral education, discipline, and national identity. The national *Course of Study* guarantees consistency and uniformity, with character education systematically woven throughout all subjects. Japan's focus on harmonious intellectual, moral, and social growth has enhanced its performance in global evaluations and established its curriculum as a benchmark for other nations

Overall, the findings indicate that no single curriculum development strategy can be universally applied. Centralized systems tend to ensure coherence and alignment with national goals, while decentralized systems promote flexibility, innovation, and local relevance. Shared difficulties in all five countries involve sustaining curriculum relevance in the face of fast technological advancements, guaranteeing teacher readiness, advancing equity, and balancing standardization with adaptability. These results indicate that successful curriculum development necessitates a flexible and context-aware strategy that combines robust policy guidance, skilled teacher capabilities, and adaptability to social and global needs.

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