



## **Teacher Agency and Pedagogical Innovation in Islamic Elementary Education: A Conceptual Review of Curriculum Demands and Classroom Realities**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary curriculum reforms, the increasing demand for pedagogical innovation, and the complexity of classroom realities have positioned teachers as central actors in Islamic elementary education. Yet pedagogical innovation is often discussed primarily in terms of new methods, digital tools, or instructional models, while the teacher's professional capacity to interpret, negotiate, and enact curriculum expectations remains insufficiently theorized. This article aims to conceptualize teacher agency as a mediating capacity that connects curriculum demands with pedagogical innovation in Islamic elementary education. Employing library research with a conceptual review design, the study synthesizes recent scholarly literature on teacher agency, curriculum reform, pedagogical innovation, classroom realities, and Islamic education. The review indicates that teacher agency is not merely a matter of individual autonomy or creativity, but a reflective, ethical, and context-responsive professional capacity through which teachers translate curriculum expectations into meaningful, adaptive, value-oriented, and developmentally appropriate learning practices. The article concludes that strengthening teacher agency is essential for sustaining pedagogical innovation in Islamic elementary classrooms. Future empirical studies are recommended to examine how this conceptual framework operates in madrasah ibtidaiyah and Islamic elementary school contexts.

**Keywords:** Teacher Agency, Pedagogical Innovation, Islamic Elementary Education, Curriculum Demands, Classroom Realities, Conceptual Review



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### **Introduction**

The debate around the concept of teacher agency in Islamic elementary education has gained relevancy, as teachers are expected to convert curriculum expectations into practical classroom realities. This is important, because Islamic elementary schools are not merely responsible for the students' academic achievement. They are also responsible for developing moral, religious, social, and developmental skills in young learners. Contemporary data focusing on curriculum-centred findings support the claim

that teachers are expected to embrace twenty-first-century competencies, differentiated instruction, assessment literacy, digital literacy, and contextualised learning as new imperatives in instructional design and course praxis (Herlinawati et al., 2024). This task is made more complicated in Islamic education, as teachers must also think about the professional growth of their practices, ethical behaviour and religiously grounded pedagogical knowledge (Masuwai et al., 2024). Such social and educative facts suggest that teacher agency requires closer conceptual scrutiny as a bridge between the curricular demands of school systems and the realities within classrooms.

In recent years, research has focused on various topics including teacher agency, pedagogical innovation, curriculum reform, differentiated instruction, assessment reform, digital literacy, Islamic teacher professionalism, and Muslim learner responsiveness; however, these discussions are largely found in isolation from one another in the scholarly literature. Teacher agency during curriculum reform focuses on teacher capacity to analyse contradictions and respond to expectations of reform (Dinh & Sannino, 2024); transformative agency studies highlight the role of teachers in mediating educational practices through collaborative reflection leading to change at a whole-school level (Reinius et al., 2022; Wei & Sannino, 2024). The Teacher Innovation Studies conceptualised innovation as a process involving the generation, implementation, evaluation, and sustainability of new pedagogical ideas [8], while research on curriculum-related aspects referenced twenty-first-century competencies, assessment reform/differentiated instruction (or both), professional development, and contextualised curricular adaptation,. Finally, well-established scholarship in Islamic education also identifies professional self-appraisal and responsiveness to Muslim learners as crucial aspects of value-sensitive pedagogy (Masuwai et al., 2024; Memon & Chown, 2023). The main novelty of this article is that it synthesises these strands within an analytical framework that conceptualises teacher agency as a mediating variable between curriculum demands and pedagogical innovation in Islamic elementary education.

As a preliminary investigation into how teacher agency articulates the relationship between curriculum pressures and classroom contexts that facilitate or hinder pedagogical innovation in Islamic elementary education, this article examines the concept of teacher agency. This goal is crucial because curriculum reform can only be understood as an educational matter as teachers interpret, adapt, and enact it through

context-sensitive pedagogical acts. Research suggests that reform-related teacher responses are mediated by professional development, assessment demands, learner characteristics, and institutional support for reform efforts/dazed school capacity (Haug & Mork, 2021; Ketonen & Nieminen, 2024; Langelaan et al., 2024). Woven from these concerns, the article asks three interrelated research questions: What is teacher agency emerging from a conceptual lens in Islamic elementary education? How do curriculum requirements generate pedagogical innovation, and how can teacher agencies bridge between curriculum specifications and classroom practices? Collectively, these questions structure the article as a conceptual review based upon literature synthesis, not field-based data.

This study contributes to the literature some insight into how to approach pedagogical innovation in Islamic elementary education – away from a simple process-product perspective (program curriculum) and towards a mediated approach. This contribution is relevant because pedagogical innovation tends to be framed in relation to methods, technology, curriculum tools or classroom activities – and less systematically around the teacher-as-an interpretive ethical entity. This article builds on earlier work on teacher agency that positions teacher agency as the conceptual link between curricular demands and classroom realities for engagement in deep Islamic elementary learning (Asmayawati et al., 2024; Dinh & Sannino, 2024; Langelaan et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Masuwai et al., 2024). This perspective may guide future researchers as they investigate how Islamic elementary teachers navigate tensions between policy expectations, institutional constraints, student diversity, and Islamic values in their pedagogical decision-making. It has also been a starting point for doing empirical research on madrasah ibtidaiyah and Islamic elementary schools.

## **Methods**

It is thus a qualitative design that follows a conceptual review of data synthesised from existing literature. This rationale was chosen, as the study aims to review and synthesise growing evidence around teacher agency, pedagogical creativity, curriculum guidelines, and the nature of classroom experiences in Islamic primary education. However, this study is neither a report that tests hypotheses, a quality-of-intervention analysis, nor a quantitative empirical study focused on educational outcomes. It also suggests that teacher agency may lead to mediating relationships between curriculum

demands and innovative teaching practices, which can enhance the overall effectiveness of teaching in Islamic primary education. For this purpose, a conceptual review is suitable because it provides the researcher the freedom to clarify key concepts, compare theories and discover deficiencies or incoherencies in concepts and theory that he/she can integrate into his/her framework based on existing literature (Pettigrew, 1997; Maslyuk et al., 2018).

**Data Sources** The publication uses peer-reviewed academic articles directly connected to the content of the paper as data sources. This investigation did not require any human beings to participate, including instructors, students, principals, and parents, because this inquiry was literature-based. This study primarily examined academic literature and scholarly artefacts related to teacher agency, pedagogical innovation, curriculum and assessment reform, differentiated instruction, and digital literacy, focusing on Islamic education teachers and their responsiveness to the realities of Muslim learners. The literature contained only articles from 2020-2024 to build a review that reflects current research conversations. Index-Scopus, academic publisher, scientific journal: References were limited to articles from indexed sources published in Scopus and by renowned academic publishers, as far as possible, accessible through the ScienceDirect/Elsevier platform, while ensuring that each source was traceable and manageable using a reference management tool such as Mendeley or Zotero.

The selection of literature was guided by inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria covered publications that: addressed one or more of the article's core concepts; were published between 2020 and 2024; appeared in peer-reviewed journals or reputable academic outlets; and provided theoretical, conceptual, or empirical insights relevant to teacher agency, curriculum demands, pedagogical innovation, Islamic education, or elementary education. Publications were excluded if they were not academically peer-reviewed, lacked a clear connection to the article's conceptual focus, were published outside the selected time range, or could not be verified through reliable academic databases or reference managers. These criteria were applied to ensure that the review was based on credible, relevant, and traceable scholarly sources.

The data were collected through documentation-based procedures. The process of using the data consisted of identification, scanning, selecting, and arranging relevant academic readings. The keywords used in the literature search include 'teacher agency', 'teacher agency and curriculum reform', 'pedagogical innovations', 'teacher innovations',

'curricular demands', 'classroom realities', 'pedagogy', and 'Islamic education teachers', as well as 'Muslim learners' and 'students' in relation to differentiated instruction (i.e., these keywords were searched and compiled for topics related to the four constructs that serve as the foundation for the article, both individually and in combination). Each selected source was meticulously examined for its relevance to the research objectives, its conceptual contribution, and its ability to support the proposed framework. This study is based on published academic literature rather than primary field data, with documentation used as the format.

Data were analysed through thematic content analysis and conceptual synthesis. This method involved conducting a thorough examination of the chosen literature to detect common themes, arguments and theoretical perspectives. It was followed by open coding of critical elucidation points derived from thoughts on teacher agency, constraints to curriculum and pedagogical innovation, classroom context for Islamic primary education, etc. We then grouped these codes into a set of thematic groupings, with each theme corresponding to a subsection in the Results and Discussion. Once the category of themes was established, the literature was reviewed further for similarities and tensions or gaps in existing studies. In the final step, we synthesised the themes into a conceptual model that frames teacher agency as a bridge between mediation of the curriculum and pedagogy/managing daily classroom challenges in Islamic schools.

Source credibility, traceability, relevance verification, and analytical coherence ensured the review's reliability. We improved the credibility of data sources by utilising peer-reviewed literature indexed in international databases, which we could verify through both the metadata base and reference management. Traceability was achieved by ensuring that each in-text citation could be traced back to a full reference entry and that no unverifiable sources were used. In evaluating relevance, we assayed whether the selected source pertained directly to a conceptual focus of the paper. In order to sharpen analytical coherence, the analysis was structured into four components: the study objectives themselves (two-level approach); research questions; literature selection (theoretical sampling; Kotz et al. Given that this research represents a conceptual review, it cannot fulfil the demands for statistical generalisability regarding its external validity. Nevertheless, we strive to curate the literature carefully, clearly describe analytic procedures and organise our synthesis of the literature in a way that reflects these logical links.

## Results and Discussion

### *Teacher Agency Framework of Islamic Elementary Education*

Recent literature conceptualises teacher agency as a context-based professional capacity that develops through enactment within the boundaries of policy, institutional culture, and the classroom environment (e.g., research on curriculum reform suggests that agency is not merely a characteristic or personality trait; it is part of a process by which teachers interpret the needs of reform agendas, respond to pressures from assessments, and make pedagogical choices among available spaces for action (Poulton, 2020). Work emerging from Elsevier also demonstrates that when teachers are to embody new subjects, digital competence, or reform-oriented practices in changing educational ecologies, agency becomes important (Nagel et al., 2023). Recently, some studies in the field of Islamic education about Islamic teacher education and teachers of Islamic education propose that professional identity, religious values and pedagogical responsibility influence how teachers perceive the work they do (Khakwani et al., 2022; Masuwai et al., 2024).

Rephrasing this conceptual stance, therefore, it is plausible to interpret teacher agency in Islamic elementary education as the ability of teachers to make pedagogical decisions responsively while negotiating curriculum demands and the moral ends of Islamic learning. The idea should extend beyond your autonomy, creativity, and inability to make policy. It is the teacher's capacity to read classroom contexts, flavour curricular demands with meaningful instruction, and inform innovation based on the developmental and spiritual needs of students. Research studies focused on reforming the midlevel curriculum also highlight that agency is not guaranteed but can be facilitated or inhibited by institutional expectations, professional preparation, and access to pedagogical resources (Poulton, 2020). This potentiality is also linked to the professional identity of teachers in Islamic education contexts (Khakwani et al., 2022). This review frames agency as a professional capacity rooted in reflection and values rather than technical skill.

A narrower synthesis indicates that teacher agency is evident when Islamic elementary teachers operationalise abstract expectations in their classroom decision-making. For instance, a teacher may redesign classroom activities, adapt the curriculum and instructional materials based on available technology, relate content to Islamic values or select participatory approaches that are appropriate for children (available

tools and resources); in addition, adapt teaching methods into child-specific modes as per available classroom resources. Studying how teachers exercise agency in enacting reform curricula reveals that the forces influencing teacher choices are tied not just to reform ideals but also to the classroom realities of assessment demands, learner diversity, constraints on available resources, and professional readiness. Previous reports, Poulton (2020), and (Scanlon & Connolly, 2021). More recently, two Elsevier study papers focused on Islamic education teachers show that improvement targets, such as professional development, pedagogical content knowledge, and self-assessment, contribute to enhancing professional activities through capacity development for more effective performative action (Masuwai et al., 2024; Memon & Chown, 2023). We interpret teacher agency as the link connecting policy goals with values-based teaching innovation (residing within pedagogical strategies).

#### *Curriculum Stressors and the Necessity of Pedagogical Innovation*

Recent literature also suggests that curriculum demands are changing from content delivery to competency integration and assessment reform to meaningful learning design. Curriculum is now often called on to provide opportunities for collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking, which teachers must interpret as part of their lesson planning process and classroom situational contexts (Herlinawati et al., 2024). At the same time, this creates conceptual and practical tensions regarding assessment reform, which requires changes not only in assessment methods but also in teachers' understanding of learning, achievement, and evaluation in practice. Such demands are even more multi-faceted in Islamic elementary pedagogy, as teachers must foster intellectual capacity while also facilitating moral, religious and social formation during education. Research studies indicate that curriculum documents are not neutral; they frame teachers' professional choices and provide pressure for pedagogical innovation in real classroom contexts.

This review presents pedagogical innovation not simply as a glossy accompaniment to a curriculum expectation in the classroom but rather as an essential response. Recent work conceptualising teacher innovation clarifies that the process of innovation involves obtaining, creating, executing and interpreting educational ideas (i.e., in connection with educational goals and contextual needs) with respect for novel pedagogies while employing sustainable practices as well as adaptive/modifiable (Liu

et al., 2024). Studies reveal that curricular adaptation can be more fruitful when it is associated with digital literacy, local wisdom, cultural relevance, and sustainability in a learning environment (Asmayawati et al., 2024). Such perspectives have significant implications for foundational Islamic elementary education, as the concept of innovation cannot be interpreted solely in relation to technology or interesting learning activities. It needs to be interpreted as the ability of a teacher to replace learning in such a way that curriculum expectations, Islamic values, children's developmental characteristics and classroom resources are meaningfully aligned. In this sense, every single pedagogical innovation depends on teacher agency in the form of reflective professional action.

A rough synthesis suggests that the demands of a curriculum often become unmanageable as they remain unequal to uneven classroom realities. They may be asked to incorporate values, reinforce literacy and numeracy, promote active learning and digital competence, or support character education. However, all of these proposals face challenges such as limited resources, diversity in the learner population, administrative workloads, and professional readiness. Recent literature on digital literacy in Indonesia argues that access to technology alone is not enough; more collaboration, innovation and sustainability are required for further educational transformation (Ika Sari et al., 2024). Continuous professional self-assessment is described as essential in Islamic education for teachers to reflect on their knowledge and skills, personalities, or environments in order to improve practice (Masuwai et al., 2024). This review reads curriculum demands as sources of both pressure and opportunity. Innovation in pedagogy is thus viable when teachers have agency in negotiating the reform moves with classroom constraints and educational purposes driven by values, as this allows them to tailor their teaching methods to better meet the needs of their students and the goals of the curriculum.

### *Classroom Realities in Islamic Elementary Education*

Classroom realities in literature are multi-faceted pedagogical environments where curriculum aspirations meet with learner diversity, institutional demands, resource availability and teachers' professional preparedness. (Barak, 2024) illustrates how teachers' pedagogical beliefs are constructed by tensions between idealised education and the real affordances of the classroom, whereas Langelaan et al. (2024) argue that "differentiated instruction means that teachers use responsive teaching methods based on varying academic needs, rather than relying on the same teaching

procedures for all students." At the elementary level, studies on various aspects of educational practices report serious practical obstacles such as cumbersome classes, inadequate resources and improving curriculum delivery (Imran et al., 2024); however, it has not been figured out how these factors leave their impact upon instructional quality. Aspects of school culture also influence teachers' motivational commitment to implement curricula (Boudouaia et al., 2024) – such as relationships, self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Thus, in Islamic classrooms, teachers must be responsive to learners' religious identities, which introduces a new concern for pedagogical responsibility that requires attention to the values and lived experiences of Muslim students (Memon & Chown, 2023).

This review does not merely portray classroom realities in Islamic elementary education as challenging barriers for teacher agency and pedagogical innovation but understands such factors as part of a context that shapes how teacher agency and innovative pedagogy are enacted. Research into reform-oriented teaching indicates that teachers require professional support when converting twenty-first-century competencies from policy aspirations in vision documents to reality in their classrooms (Haug & Mork, 2021). Such evidence from rural schools illustrates that curriculum expectations are likely to be poorly implemented in contexts where teachers lack pedagogical knowledge, effective training support and sufficient resources (Roshid & Haider, 2024). As a matter of classroom practice, assessment reform can either constrain or liberate teachers based on how they interpret its purposes and pressures, which can vary significantly depending on their training, resources, and the specific educational context they are in. Studies about curriculum also indicate that teachers' understanding of skills, particularly skills-based learning, significantly influences the quality of planning (Herlinawati et al., 2024), and that contextualised adaptation can serve as a powerful tool for innovation if it incorporates local wisdom and digital literacy (Asmayawati et al., 2024).

As an alternative, a closer synthesis indicates that classroom realities in Islamic elementary education call for teachers to act as agents of choice by making contextually sensitive, value-laden, and developmentally appropriate decisions. Islamic education teachers must continuously conduct a self-reflection/self-assessment process to increase knowledge, skills, personality, and environmental awareness because teaching is an arena for moral and religious formation (Masuwai et al., 2024). Professional identity in

Islamic teacher education is situated (Khakwani et al., 2022); the pedagogical, cultural and ideological contexts affect how teachers perceive their roles, which in turn influences their ability to implement innovative teaching practices that meet the diverse needs of their students. Simultaneously, teacher innovation is about the exploration, realisation, and evaluation of new teaching practices that address real needs within education (Liu et al., 2024). The research on digital transformation indicates that if classroom experimentation can link up with school-level innovation, then teachers become transformative agents who can implement effective changes in their teaching methods and contribute to the overall improvement of the educational system (Reinius et al., 2022). In Indonesia, studies on character education also show evidence that learning is meaningful when integrated with cultural values and community participation as well as fun for child development (Sakti et al., 2024), suggesting that such integration not only enhances student engagement but also fosters a sense of identity and belonging among learners.

### *Teacher Agency as a Mediating Force*

Recent studies associate teacher agency as an intermediary between educational reform and classroom transformation. Research on curriculum reform shows that teachers do not simply respond to policy directions as they are more or less enacted, but instead they interpret, adapt and implement policy through situated professional judgement (Dinh & Sannino, 2024). Studies on transformative agency also highlight the necessity of teachers collectively working through contradictions, institutional routines and future-oriented opportunities to launch educational change (Wei & Sannino, 2024). Similar narratives refer to teachers as transformative leaders able to transform school culture when the innovation is integrated with professional, collaborative and contextual experimentation (Reinius et al., 2022). Teacher innovation elaborates that pedagogical practices depend on the generation of ideas, implementation, evaluation and continuation work (Liu et al., 2024). There are also studies on technology-enhanced teaching that consider professional capital and constructivist belief as the mediators of teacher capacity in relation to instructional innovation (Zhang et al., 2024).

This review situates teacher agency in Islamic elementary education as the occupational link between what curriculum may require and how this becomes pedagogically worthwhile in real classroom settings. More than compliance with

twenty-first-century skills (TFS) requirements from the curriculum, assessment reform and differentiated instruction (DI), and theories around digital literacy assume that teachers will have and make informed pedagogical decisions about educational appropriateness for children (Herlinawati et al., 2024; Langelaan et al., 2024). Findings from knowledge utilisation research also reveal that teachers cannot move reform ideas from policy vision to classroom reality with limited support over time (Haug & Mork, 2021). The mediating role in the Islamic education context becomes particularly value-laden as teachers must link academic learning with moral, religious and social development (Gholami et al., 2021; Masuwai et al., 2024). As such, teacher agency is not another variable but the connective intellectual/human/interpretive capacity that relates curriculum to pedagogy, values, and lived classroom reality.

On a more systemic / theoretical level, the synthesis suggests that teacher agency serves to mediate pedagogical innovation through the ability of teachers to negotiate limits while maintaining educational purpose. Islamic elementary teachers most likely lack both the resources to launch this transformation (in terms of time and support) as well as extreme heterogeneity in student abilities, parental pressure, institutional traditions, and the challenge of teaching moral values together with general subjects. On the other hand, literature related to Muslim learners emphasises culturally and religiously responsive pedagogy (Memon & Chown, 2023), while studies regarding local wisdom-based learning and digital literacy have shown that working in a sociocultural context increases collaboration and innovation in learning design (Asmayawati et al., 2024; Ika Sari et al., 2024). Research of teacher autonomy support also suggests teachers help establish learning environments that can enhance their students' self-efficacy, reflection, and assessment literacy (Xu et al., 2024). This review helps us see teacher agency as the way to turn curriculum demands into changes in teaching that are responsive, value-driven, and appropriate for the students' development.

### ***Proposed Conceptual Framework***

The reviewed literature suggests a conceptual model linking curriculum demands, the agency of the teacher, innovations in pedagogy or practices, and classroom realities with meaningful learning in Islamic elementary schools. The demands of the twenty-first-century curriculum increasingly encourage teachers to embed twenty-first-century skills, assessment reform, digital literacy, contextual learning, and learner-

centred pedagogy in their implementation of classroom practice (Herlinawati et al., 2024; Ketonen & Nieminen, 2024; Roshid & Haider, 2024). Similarly, pedagogical innovation – or the ability to apply new methods in teaching (Liu et al., 2024) is defined as “intentionally professional work addressing the process of idea development, enactment, and assessment, followed by iterations and sustainment. Research about curriculum adaptation, however, provides more support for the idea that innovation in design becomes stronger when learning is linked with local wisdom, digital literacy, and contextual relevance (Asmayawati et al., 2024). The review builds these ideas into a framework where curriculum demands serve as the starting point, while teacher agency acts as an explanatory tool that gives insight into how these demands are enacted in practice.

In particular, this review places teacher agency as a mediating force within the framework presented. Recent studies of curriculum reform indicate that teachers require agency to diagnose contradictions, negotiate reform expectations and devise context-sensitive responses to policy imperatives (Dinh & Sannino, 2024). Research on transformative agency emphasises the importance of teachers' potential to reason about alternatives, their opportunities for professional collaboration in a culture of enaction and more (Reinius et al., 2022; Wei & Sannino, 2024). Further place-based professional development literature indicates the need for ongoing support to translate curriculum visions into practical classroom strategies (Haug & Mork, 2021), particularly in helping teachers develop the skills necessary to implement these strategies effectively in diverse educational settings. In Islamic education, teacher agency is also shaped by professional identity, religious commitment, and continuous self-assessment (Gholami et al., 2021; Masuwai et al., 2024). This interpretation suggests that teacher agency should not be treated as an individual attribute alone, but as a relational capacity shaped by policy expectations, institutional support, religious values, and classroom constraints. Without such agency, curriculum demands may remain normative statements rather than lived pedagogical practices in Islamic elementary classrooms.

This framework contains a conceptual trajectory from curriculum demands to teacher autonomy, then teacher autonomy to pedagogical innovation, and finally pedagogy for Islamic elementary meaningful learning. Our understanding of classroom realities is a context that may facilitate, place limits on or reshape each of these movements and ultimately determine how creatively teachers can enter with elements

from Islamic values while negotiating limitations to responses that children need. The literature on Muslim learners stresses that pedagogical responsiveness requires awareness of religious identity and learner experience (Memon & Chown, 2023), while studies on digital literacy in Indonesian education highlight the importance of collaboration, innovation, and sustainability to educational change (Ika Sari et al., 2024). Research on Islamic education teachers also finds that reflection enhances teacher awareness of knowledge, skills, personalities, and environments (Masuwai et al., 2024). Read in conjunction with research on teacher agency and systems-level reform, these studies indicate that significant Islamic learning takes place when teachers reproduce the contours between policy, pedagogy, values and classroom realities, which suggests that effective teaching practices must integrate these elements to foster a holistic educational environment (Dinh & Sannino, 2024; Liu & Yin, 2024)

### **Conclusion**

This conceptual review shows that teacher agency is not merely an individual teacher's autonomy, creativity, or willingness to innovate, but a mediating professional capacity that enables curriculum demands to become meaningful classroom practices in Islamic elementary education. The main lesson drawn from the review is that pedagogical innovation does not emerge automatically from curriculum reform, policy expectations, or the availability of new instructional approaches. It depends on teachers' ability to interpret curriculum goals, negotiate classroom realities, and align pedagogical decisions with children's academic, developmental, moral, and religious needs. The synthesis also indicates that classroom realities—such as learner diversity, limited resources, assessment pressures, institutional culture, and expectations for Islamic value integration—shape the way innovation is enacted. Teacher agency therefore becomes the practical and ethical bridge between curriculum aspirations and lived pedagogical experience.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to reframing pedagogical innovation in Islamic elementary education as a mediated and contextual process. Rather than viewing innovation only as the use of technology, new methods, or attractive classroom activities, this review positions innovation as a value-oriented pedagogical response shaped by teacher agency. The proposed framework contributes conceptually by linking four central elements: curriculum demands, teacher agency,

pedagogical innovation, and classroom realities. It also extends the discussion of Islamic elementary education by showing that teachers are not passive curriculum implementers, but interpretive actors who transform policy expectations into developmentally appropriate and religiously meaningful learning. This perspective may support scholars, teacher educators, and school leaders in understanding why strengthening teacher agency is essential for sustainable innovation in Islamic elementary classrooms.

This study is limited by its conceptual review design, which relies on selected academic literature rather than primary data from teachers, students, classrooms, or school communities. As a result, the proposed framework should be understood as a theoretical synthesis that still requires empirical validation in specific Islamic elementary education contexts. The review is also limited by its focus on recent literature and selected themes related to teacher agency, curriculum demands, pedagogical innovation, and classroom realities. Future research may examine this framework through qualitative case studies, classroom observations, teacher interviews, or mixed-method designs in madrasah ibtidaiyah and Islamic elementary schools. Further studies may also investigate how institutional leadership, professional development, digital infrastructure, and school culture strengthen or constrain teacher agency in implementing pedagogical innovation. Such inquiry would deepen understanding of how conceptual agency becomes actual classroom practice.

### **Generative AI Statement**

As the authors of this work, we used the AI tool ChatGPT to enhance the clarify, structure, and the linguistic accuracy of the manuscript to meet the academic standards. After using this AI tool, we thoroughly reviewed and verified the final version of our work. We, as the authors, take full responsibility for the content of our published work.

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