

Trends in Curriculum and Narrative Research: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Although narrative inquiry has the potential to emphasize personal experiences and the dynamics shaping teacher identity, it has been underutilized within curriculum research. This study provides a comprehensive summary of research on the intersection between narrative inquiry and curriculum. A systematic content analysis was employed to examine prior studies on these topics. The dataset consisted of 205 articles published in Scopus-indexed journals between 2013 and 2023, with annual publication counts ranging from 8 to 53 articles. The results demonstrate a growing body of literature on curriculum and narrative, reflecting dynamic trends in scientific publication. The findings highlight variations in subject areas, research methods, and geographical contributions, all of which are related to narrative and curriculum studies. The narrative curriculum represents an innovative research approach that uncovers lived realities as a unit analysis to be understood within curriculum studies.

Keywords: Bibliometric analysis, curriculum, narrative inquiry, teacher experience, VOSviewer

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Introduction

Education and curriculum are subfields within the social sciences that focus on research into how humans learn (Mohajan, 2018). Research distinguishes teaching and educating based on processes and intended outcomes (Hadiapurwa et al., 2024; Sancar et al., 2021; Zeichner, 2017). Studies have often linked curriculum development to its structured, scientific approach and examined its popularity due to its applicability and clarity. Research investigates the curriculum as a planned program, documented in writing and implemented by teachers (Handelzalts, 2019; Voogt et al., 2016). Scholars have analyzed why this method is widespread across ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand (Faikhamta, 2018; Nasir, 2020; Syomwene, 2020). However, other studies point out that this approach faces criticism, particularly in the current era (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018, p. 217). In recent research, postmodern perspectives have increasingly challenged the dominance of structural and scientific curriculum approaches (Lăzăroiu, 2020; Nica, 2018; Popescu, 2018).

However, critics have highlighted the limitations of this model in addressing the complexities and uncertainties of the modern world (Hasanovna, 2022; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Ropo, 2018). Curriculum development as a modern approach has been criticized for its rigid, pre-planned structure, where objectives, processes, and outcomes are predetermined. In this view, teachers are seen primarily as implementers of prescribed content. Conversely, a narrative approach offers a more contextual and emotional understanding of teachers, recognizing their lived experiences (Scherer et al., 2023). Incorporating narrative into the curriculum enhances teacher agency and promotes a more equitable and responsive

educational practice (Orstein & Hunkins, 2018, p. 268; Tao & Gao, 2017). Rapid and unpredictable changes characterize this context. In such a dynamic environment, a systematically designed curriculum development model often struggles to adapt effectively. These inconsistencies have impacted the methodologies and critical thinking employed within social, political, and cultural contexts (Pinar et al., 2008). Critiques of generalization and rigid structuring deconstruct the notion that logical and scientific reasoning are the sole sources of truth (Holtz, 2020). This paradigm emerged as a reaction to traditional educational frameworks, often perceived as overly mechanical and structured, and reflects a broader desire to embrace learner autonomy. The curriculum is also seen as a never-ending story. Accordingly, the narrative approach conceptualizes the curriculum as lived and dynamic, reflecting the complexities of real-life experiences.

Western paradigms have long influenced traditional curricula, where content-centric models dominate formal education (Harjatanaya & Hoon, 2020; Kyrychenko, 2018; Ma'Arif, 2018). Tyler's influential model of curriculum development has significantly shaped national education goals, instructional materials, learning strategies, and evaluation practices, and has been widely adopted in various countries (Ashari et al., 2023; Nasir, 2021; Prehanto et al., 2019; Prehanto et al., 2021). However, anthropocentric and pluralistic frameworks have been criticized for their rigidity and tendency to generalize the human experience. In response, scholars such as Clandinin (2019), Clandinin and Connelly (1990), and Downey and Clandinin (2019) have advanced narrative research as an alternative, emphasizing in-depth and relational analyses of lived stories and experiences. This aligns with the humanistic principles of educational practice.

A teacher's life experiences significantly shape their thinking, values, and pedagogical approach (Parks, 2023). Prior studies have shown that experience-based narratives can inform the development of more contextual and relevant curricula (Barros et al., 2021; Milles et al., 2019; Mpuangnan & Ntombela, 2024; Rosiek & Clandinin, 2019). Schools are increasingly viewed as complex ecosystems involving diverse stakeholders, including students, teachers, and administrators, who collectively contribute to the educational process. The present study provides a comprehensive, objective, and transparent overview of current research on narrative and curriculum. The following research questions guided the inquiry.

What are the trends in Scopus-indexed publications on curriculum and narrative inquiry from 2013 to 2023?

What do co-citation networks reveal about key scholars and conceptual influences in curriculum and narrative inquiry research?

What are the emerging research topics in curriculum and narrative inquiry that warrant further exploration?

Key Advances

The use of narrative methods in curriculum research gained prominence in the 1980s, led by notable scholars such as Clandinin, Connelly, Craig, Ropo, Ladson-Billings, and Conle, who have been central to advancing narrative research in education (Clandinin et al., 2011; Connelly et al., 2003; Craig et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2016; Ropo, 2018; Sahling & De Carvalho, 2021; Sharma & Phillion, 2021).

Building on this foundation, scholars, including Clandinin (2019), Ropo (2018), and Zen et al. (2023), have emphasized that narratives offer meaningful insights by linking past experiences to present contexts and future implications. The field of curriculum studies has evolved through a dynamic interplay of ideas from influential figures such as Bobbitt, Tyler, Taba, Saylor, Doll, and Pinar, reflecting a growing shift toward more flexible and reflective curriculum models (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Against the backdrop of limited Scopus-indexed publications specifically addressing narrative and curriculum, this research contributes detailed insights into the complexities of implementing narrative approaches in classroom contexts.

Methodology

Research Method

This research employed a systematic content analysis approach to examine prior scholarly literature at the intersection of curriculum and narrative. *Publish or Perish* and bibliometric databases were utilized to retrieve articles relevant to narrative and curriculum studies. VOSviewer was used to conduct detailed analyses and generate optimal visualizations, aiming to explore the correlations between topics within the curriculum and narrative domains (Nuryadin et al., 2024). This study differs from conventional systematic reviews, which typically only describe co-citation and visualization using bibliometrics. This study involves the co-citation and visualization to provide more understanding of the field in narrative inquiry applied field not only globally, but also at the micro or regional level.

Sample and Data Collection

This study did not require ethical approval because it exclusively analyzed publicly available bibliometric and content data from Scopus-indexed publications and involved no human participants or personal data. For this reason, this study did not employ any human subjects or personal data related to human participation. The data used are available in an accessible publication. An initial search of Scopus-indexed journals yielded 205 relevant articles. A data retrieval process was conducted using Publish or Perish to obtain comprehensive bibliometric information. Articles selected for analysis had citation counts ranging from 9 to 53 and were published between 2013 and 2023. The nine score defines the lowest value chosen, representing the minimum number of citations received by the articles, while the highest value, 53, indicates the maximum number of citations. Citation counts are used as an indicator to assess

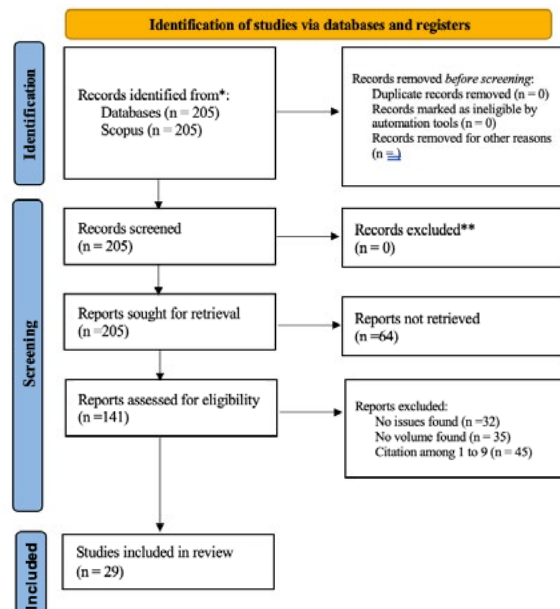
the impact or scholarly contribution of a given study (Bornman et al., 2008; Kumar, 2025).

Data Analysis

The content analysis was divided into several key components: 1) the countries with the highest number of publications; 2) the development of publications from 2013 to 2023; 3) the academic fields utilizing narrative studies; 4) countries with the highest volume of narrative-related publications; 5) the visualization of frequently appearing narrative researchers; 6) co-citation patterns; and 7) the correlation between narrative research and curriculum, particularly in the context of teachers and teaching (Burroughs et al., 2019; Graham et.al., 2020; Trujillo & Long, 2018; Wang et al., 2016). A systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted using the PRISMA analysis model, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

PRISMA Diagram of the Article Selection Process



Results and Discussion

Quantity and Trends of Publications Related to Narrative and Curriculum

Figure 2 illustrates the number of articles collected from Scopus-indexed journals between 2013 and 2023. Notably, 2021 and 2022 demonstrated the highest publication counts, with 33 and 32 articles, respectively. In 2023, 14 publications were released, indicating a continued upward trend. The peak of publications in 2021 and 2022 positioned these years as the most productive in terms of research output on curriculum and narrative within Scopus-indexed journals. Overall, publication trends from 2013 to 2023 have been dynamic, offering valuable insights and paving the way for future research in this field (Kipper et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2021).

Tabel 1 shows the countries with the highest number of Scopus-indexed publications related to curriculum and narrative. Among them, ASEAN member states, including Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand,

Table 1

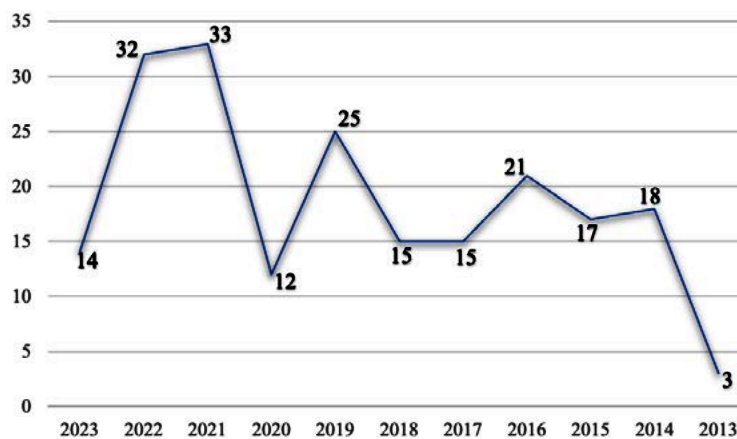
Top 10 Most Influential Countries in Curriculum and Narrative Publications (Scopus-indexed)

Number	Country/Territory	Total
1	United States	67
2	Canada	36
3	Australia	19
4	Spain	14
5	South Korea	9
6	United Kingdom	9
7	South Africa	8
8	New Zealand	7
9	China	5
10	Nepal	3

Singapore, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste, remain underrepresented in the Scopus database. However, several articles from these countries have appeared in non-Scopus sources, contributing to the growing interest in curriculum

Figure 2

Number of Publications from 2013–2023



and narrative research within the region (Han et al., 2024; Lleses, 2024; Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020). Several challenges relate to language barriers, especially the difficulty in reading and writing in academic English. This phenomenon has occurred in countries that use English as a second or foreign language (Azizah & Budiman, 2017; Phoocharoensil, 2022; Suryani et al., 2015).

Visualization of Curriculum and Narrative Inquiry

Figure 3 presents a co-citation network of narrative research in curriculum studies, based on all Scopus-indexed that cited at least two sources subsequent research. Co-citation provides insight into measuring how often the author’s works are cited. Authors such as Clandinin, Craig, Schwab, and Bruner were frequently co-cited, indicating their significant influence on the field (Clandinin et al., 2011; Conle, 1999; Craig et al., 2018). Co-citation of the authors can be used to explore the underlying and influential works within a particular research domain.

Emerging Research Topics in Curriculum and Narrative Inquiry

Figure 4 visually represents research clusters exploring curriculum through a narrative lens. This means narratives demonstrate the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration, in-depth understanding, and holistic exploration of curriculum-related issues (Md Khudzari et al., 2018). Specifically, reputable Scopus-indexed journals have published several articles on preservice teachers, emphasizing areas such as development, practice, narrative inquiry, storytelling, experience, belief, teacher education programs, competencies, and professional identity (Clark & Newbery, 2018; Gudmundsdottir & Hatlevik, 2018; Tondeur et al., 2018). Anderson and Putman (2020), Berger et al. (2018), and Podolsky et al. (2019) observed that educators’ beliefs and experiences significantly influence both formal and contextual curriculum, contributing to advancements in curriculum research.

Figure 3

Network Visualization and Co-Citation Density in Narrative Inquiry

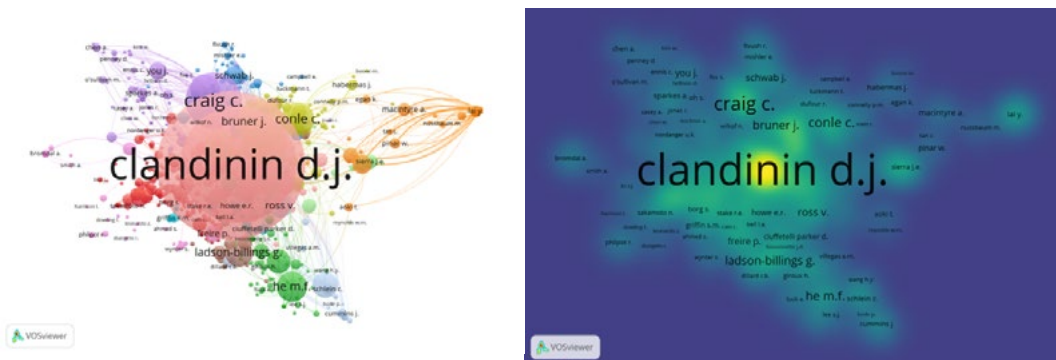


Figure 4

Research Clusters in Curriculum and Narrative Inquiry

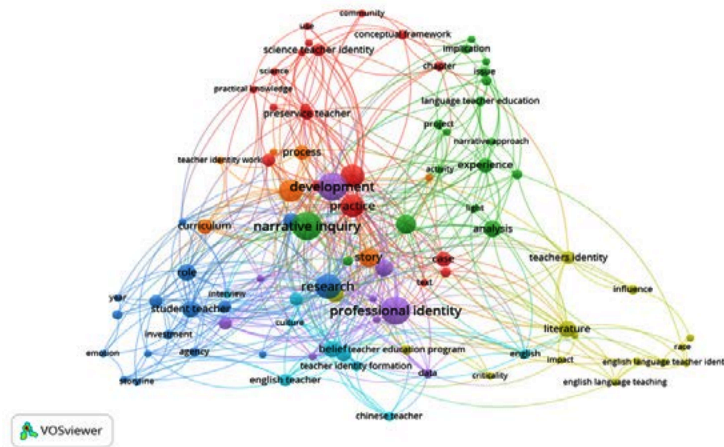


Figure 5

Fields of Narrative Inquiry within Teaching and Education

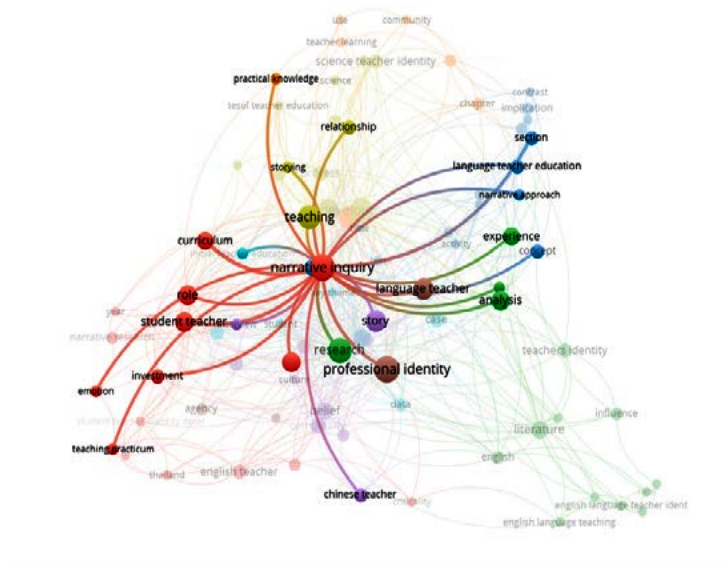


Figure 5 depicts the integration of narrative inquiry with various educational topics, including student-teachers, teacher roles, professional identity, practical knowledge, teaching experiences, language education,

practicum, investment, interaction, and emotional dimensions of teaching. This also includes teacher education in diverse cultural contexts, such as those involving Chinese teachers and language instructors (Clandinin, 2019; Cooper &

personal narrative as curriculum makers and in the construction of their identity construction (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Ropo, 2018). This research would encourage other researchers to view teachers not merely as an object, but as active subjects who can contribute to curriculum development in the classroom.

Implications for ASEAN Teacher Education Policies

The key implication of this study is the necessity of interpreting teacher narratives within context of ASEAN educational settings, where collectivist values significantly shape these narratives. In ASEAN societies, the strong emphasis on cultural unity and social harmony influences both curriculum development and the construction of teacher identity within each cultural context. Moreover, several ASEAN countries would benefit from strengthening preservice or in-service teachers training through narrative methods approaches. Efforts should also be directed toward improving the indexing of regional journals in Scopus to enhance the global visibility of ASEAN scholarship. Furthermore, increased support for funding schemes dedicated to narrative inquiry is essential to foster academic reputation and advance scholarly culture in the field of curriculum and narrative research.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated how narrative research offers unique perspectives on curriculum by revealing connections between different curricular topics and providing valuable insights into publication patterns and thematic areas within the field. Narrative provides a valuable opportunity within curriculum study, grounded in life experience. This perspective could serve

meaningful recommendations for stakeholders, such as policymakers and curriculum designers, to focus more on grassroots areas rather than top-down approaches. ASEAN ministries should integrate the narrative inquiry method into teaching training programs. ASEAN researchers should encourage Scopus-indexed publication through regional or international funding.

Most publications suggest a theoretical embrace of the curriculum construct, indicating a shift toward interpretive and qualitative understandings in the field of curriculum studies. The consistent publication output further highlights the adaptability of narrative methodology in generating depth and reinforcing values beyond mere description.

Narrative and curriculum concurrently represent a powerful theoretical lens, revealing curriculum as a dynamic field of study, professional development, and classroom interaction. Teachers interpret and adapt the curriculum through storytelling and integration within specific subjects, such as science and language, particularly in ASEAN countries.

Although this study focused on the dynamism of publication trends, its specific emphasis was on narrative inquiry in curriculum studies. The study was inherently limited by the systematic analysis approach, restricting in-depth exploration of specific theoretical applications. For instance, while narrative inquiry has identified topics such as teacher identity, these require more fully elaborated and detailed methodologies.

Future research should explore this topic using a qualitative approach, such as narrative inquiry, as the method. Narrative inquiry emphasizes personal and nuanced understandings of individual experiences among teachers,

students, and other curriculum stakeholders. It is possible to apply narrative through autobiography and life history. Finally, subsequent research should pursue in-depth qualitative studies employing narrative inquiry to understand the lived curriculum.



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Bionote

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