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Creataí Oideachais a úsáid chun Teagasc, Foghlaim agus Dearadh Curaclaim a fheabhsú:
Léirbhreithniú ar an Litríocht

Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Design through Education Frameworks:
Literature Review

Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Design through Education Frameworks

Maynooth University Leadership and EducAtion Framework (LEAF) Initiative

The Maynooth University Leadership and EducAtion Framework (LEAF) Initiative is a Centre for Teaching and Learning led initiative funded under the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) call.

The LEAF initiative is designed to support leadership in Teaching and Learning through the development and enactment of a Maynooth University Education Framework. The three-year initiative's phased implementation involves:

- Co-creation of a Maynooth University Education Framework which will support a whole-of-institution approach to curriculum design and development, and the embedding of key education priorities in the curriculum
- Collaborative design, between a cross-disciplinary Senior T&L Fellowship Team and CTL, of a Maynooth University Programme and Module Leaders Toolkit to support colleagues who wish to lead T&L enhancement using the MU Framework
- Implementation of the Programme and Module Leaders Toolkit with colleagues from across the faculties.

This literature review explores how education and curriculum frameworks can support faculty in enhancing teaching practice, fostering pedagogical leadership and reinforcing curriculum design in higher education.

The literature review offers critical foundations for the development of the Maynooth Education Framework and insights to inform initiative implementation aimed at fostering inclusive, evidence-based and values-led academic leadership in curriculum design. We hope that the review will also be a useful resource for those working in related fields, nationally and internationally.

To find out more about the work of the LEAF Initiative, you can contact Lisa O'Regan, Dr Alison Farrell or Dr Tazila Ramputh from the Maynooth University Centre for Teaching and Learning.

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Table of Contents

Summary

This literature review explores how education and curriculum frameworks can support faculty in enhancing teaching practice, fostering pedagogical leadership and advancing curriculum design practice in higher education. In response to growing institutional, national and global priorities, such as the areas of equity, inclusion, sustainability and digital transformation, there is an urgent need for structured, yet adaptable, frameworks that empower faculty as active agents of educational change.

The review synthesises current academic and policy literature, identifying key models such as the Connected Curriculum (Fung, 2017), Constructive Alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2022), Agile Backward Design (Dazeley et al., 2025), the ISEE Framework (Yang, 2015) and the SPELT evaluation model (Huber, 2017). These frameworks amongst others are evaluated not only for their pedagogical coherence, but for their ability to embed values-led leadership in Teaching and Learning (T&L), foster student-centred learning and support strategic approaches to curriculum enhancement. Critically, the review surfaces a shift away from compliance-driven or metrics-heavy frameworks toward developmental, relational and context-sensitive curricular approaches.

The review is guided by a central inquiry: how do education and curriculum frameworks support faculty in enhancing T&L, exercising pedagogical leadership and designing inclusive, sustainability-oriented curricula aligned with institutional and societal priorities? Subsidiary research questions explore the purposes and characteristics of these frameworks, their role in embedding Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and their institutional impact on curriculum innovation and leadership practice.

Key insights from the literature indicate:

- The most effective frameworks centre faculty agency, ethical leadership and co-creation with students.
- There are persistent gaps in how frameworks support emotional, cognitive and relational dimensions of faculty development.
- Institutions that align teaching enhancement with strategic priorities through structured, yet flexible frameworks report greater curriculum coherence and innovation.
- Frameworks must move beyond policy alignment and operationalise values such as justice, wellbeing and sustainability through practical, adaptable resources.

This literature review offers critical foundations for the development of the Maynooth Education Framework and insights to inform initiative implementation aimed at fostering inclusive, evidence-based and values-led academic leadership in curriculum design.

Introduction

Teaching and learning (T&L) in higher education continues to evolve in response to changing student needs, societal challenges and institutional priorities. Across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), there is increasing recognition of the value of structured, research-informed approaches that promote inclusive, flexible and future-facing educational experiences. Education frameworks have emerged as important tools in this context, supporting institutions in aligning teaching and learning practices with broader education strategies, policy commitments and global goals.

Education frameworks refer to structured models or guiding principles that assist academic colleagues in designing, delivering and evaluating effective learning. Rather than prescribing one-size-fits-all approaches, frameworks often serve as enablers of academic innovation, providing a shared foundation for developing coherent curricula, strengthening faculty development and embedding priorities such as equity, sustainability and interdisciplinarity into everyday practice. When implemented successfully, they support a culture of enhancement by making good practice visible, transferable and responsive to evolving educational landscapes.

Recent reports such as the 2024 and 2025 *EDUCAUSE Horizon Reports on Teaching and Learning* and the *Trends 2024: European higher education institutions in times of transition,* highlight the increasing role of frameworks in supporting institutional goals, faculty development and curriculum adaptability, particularly in areas such as digital transformation, sustainability education and pedagogical innovation (EDUCAUSE, 2024; EDUCAUSE, 2025; Gaebel & Zhang, 2024). Similarly, national strategies in Ireland, including the *Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to 2030*, affirm the need for systemic support for educators as they embed key priorities such as sustainability, inclusion and learner-centred design into higher education.

At Maynooth University, the commitment to enhancement is evident in its strategic goals and teaching guidelines, which promote research-informed, critically reflective and student-focused education. The development of a university-wide education framework offers a timely opportunity to consolidate strengths, support staff in leading educational change and ensure a cohesive, institution-wide approach to teaching and learning including programme and module design.

This literature review explores how education and curriculum frameworks can support such ambitions. It examines framework purposes, benefits and core features, and reviews international models and practices. It also considers how co-created approaches can support faculty development, curriculum innovation and alignment with wider strategic and policy objectives. These insights may inform the ongoing enhancement of teaching and learning across diverse higher education contexts.

Research Questions

This review is guided by the following research questions.

Overarching Research Question:

How do education and curriculum frameworks support the development of teaching and learning enhancement, leadership in teaching and learning, and curriculum design in higher education?

Subsidiary Research Questions:

- What are the purposes and key characteristics of education and curriculum frameworks in supporting teaching and learning enhancement, student learning experience and institutional educational outcomes in higher education?
- How do education and curriculum frameworks support the development of leadership in teaching and learning practice while embedding key institutional priorities such as education for sustainable development (ESD) and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)?
- What is the impact of education and curriculum frameworks on curriculum design, and teaching and learning practices, and how have higher education institutions operationalised them to nurture teaching and learning leadership?

Methodology

This literature review employed a structured, multi-stage search and analysis process to identify and synthesise high-quality research on education and curriculum frameworks in higher education. A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed journal articles, national and international reports, and institutional models was conducted, with a primary focus on sources published between 2015 and 2025. Seminal works predating this period were included only where foundational theories remain relevant and widely cited in contemporary research. A detailed set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied to ensure the selection of methodologically robust and thematically relevant studies. The review prioritised literature addressing institutional priorities such as faculty development, curriculum coherence, digital education, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Boolean search terms and modifiers were used to refine the results and include both theoretical and applied perspectives.

The selected literature was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Data were systematically coded and categorised into five dominant thematic areas:

- Theoretical Foundations and Models of Educational Frameworks
- Development of Educator Capabilities for Teaching and Learning Enhancement
- Impact on Curriculum Design and Pedagogical Innovation
- Promoting EDI and ESD
- Institutional Outcomes and Strategic Alignment

This structured methodology ensures that the review is grounded in recent, credible and contextually relevant scholarship. Further methodological details, including databases searched, search terms, selection criteria and data extraction procedures are available in the Appendix.

Understanding Education and Curriculum Frameworks in Higher Education

Defining Education and Curriculum Frameworks in Higher Education

A broad synthesis of the literature describes education and curriculum frameworks in higher education as structured, values-informed models that assist faculty in designing, delivering and evaluating effective teaching and learning. These frameworks support academic practice by offering clear, adaptable principles that guide curriculum development, promote coherence across programmes and enable alignment with institutional and national priorities (Nugent et al., 2019; Lam, 2024).

Across diverse institutional settings, frameworks are seen as tools that foster clarity in teaching approaches while encouraging innovation and responsiveness. They help educators engage with evolving student needs, disciplinary expectations and strategic goals, providing a foundation for both reflective practice and continuous enhancement (Yang, 2015; Biggs & Tang, 2022).

Recent literature emphasises a growing shift towards viewing curriculum as a dynamic and relational process, shaped through dialogue between staff, students and wider communities (Fung, 2017; University of Edinburgh, 2024). Frameworks support this approach by articulating shared values and design principles that foster inclusive, inquiry-driven and student-centred learning environments. These tools also promote a culture of shared ownership and academic leadership, where educators are empowered to embed institutional priorities in meaningful and practical ways (Nugent et al., 2019).

Several universities have developed models that integrate these principles into teaching and learning strategies. For example, the University of Reading and the University of the West of Scotland have implemented frameworks that emphasise inclusivity, coherence and connectedness across disciplines (University of Reading, n.d.; University of the West of Scotland, 2023). These models offer structured support for staff while aligning teaching with institutional strategies and sector-wide expectations.

The Higher Education Learning Framework (HELF) and the Connected Curriculum approach further illustrate how frameworks can bridge the gap between scholarly theory and everyday teaching practice. These frameworks view learning as identity and context-based, encouraging the design of curricula that reflect students' lived experiences and disciplinary development (Fung, 2017; Nugent et al., 2019; Osika et al., 2025). In parallel, values-led frameworks such as Deakin University's model and the Embedding Equality Diversity & Inclusion in the Curriculum of the new Technological University Sector (EDIT) Project toolkit demonstrate how universities can translate goals such as equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) and sustainability into curriculum structures and pedagogical strategies (Deakin University, 2024: EDIT Project, 2024).

In addition to guiding pedagogical development, frameworks play an important role in mapping graduate attributes, learning outcomes and transferable skills. This supports alignment between curriculum content, assessment practices and graduate competencies, while also enhancing transparency and strategic cohesion (Travers et al., 2019). As higher education institutions face increasing pressure to respond to interdisciplinary, international and employment-focused imperatives, frameworks also support alignment with external quality assurance and benchmarking systems (OECD, 2019; European Commission, 2020).

Some models, such as the Connected Curriculum at University College London and the Transformative Education Framework at the University of Exeter, provide whole-institution approaches. Others are more targeted, focusing on priority areas including digital teaching (HeDiCom: Tondeur et al., 2023), inclusive assessment (EDIT Project, 2024) or experiential learning (Yang, 2015). This diversity enables institutions to adopt layered or modular approaches to framework implementation, combining a shared foundation with specialist tools to address specific institutional needs and strategic ambitions.

Together, these frameworks illustrate the potential for HEIs to build supportive, forward-looking environments for teaching and learning. They serve as vehicles for coherence, enhancement and innovation, creating the conditions in which educators can thrive and students can benefit from inclusive, future-facing educational experiences.

Theoretical Models for Teaching & Learning Enhancement

The literature presents a diverse body of theoretical frameworks designed to support educators in advancing teaching and learning practices within higher education. These can be grouped into three practical domains: curriculum and pedagogy, values-led leadership and digital innovation.

Designing Learning with Purpose: Curriculum and Pedagogical Models

Several models provide structured guidance for curriculum design and the facilitation of learning. The Higher Education Learning Framework (HELF) developed by Nugent et al. (2019) introduces principles such as metacognition, identity development and contextual learning, highlighting the holistic and social nature of learning. Agile Backward Design (ABD) (Dazeley et al., 2025) reimagines backward design as a responsive, iterative process, while Mills, Wiley and Williams (2019) demonstrate its effectiveness in developing academic inquiry and student competencies. Fung's (2017) Connected Curriculum promotes the integration of research and teaching, encouraging students to become active participants in the creation of knowledge. Yang's (2015) ISEE Framework (Inquiry-based, Scaffolding Tasks, Engaging Classroom Dialogues and Engaged Critical Reflections) supports learner autonomy and resilience through a structured approach to self-sustained learning.

Leading Through Partnership and Values

Leadership in higher education teaching and learning is increasingly characterised by collaboration, reflection and shared responsibility. Within this evolving approach, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) offers a framework that emphasises strengths-based development, identity formation and the cultivation of affirming relationships between educators and learners (Gano & Oxendine, 2023). This focus on relational and developmental dynamics aligns closely with inclusive practices in curriculum leadership. Similarly, Healey and Healey (2024) promote Student–Staff Partnerships (SSPs) as a model of shared curriculum leadership, where students are engaged as active contributors to course design. This approach not only deepens students' engagement but also fosters a sense of belonging and co-ownership in

learning, reinforcing the collaborative values underpinning contemporary pedagogical leadership.

Enhancing Digital Pedagogy and Innovation

Frameworks supporting digital innovation are central to contemporary teaching enhancement. For example, Zhang and Yu's (2023) Mobile Pedagogical Framework emphasises interactivity, feedback and learner agency in mobile environments, highlighting the importance of dynamic learner engagement. Complementing this, Reyna et al. (2018) offer a framework for digital media design that encourages multimodal expression and critical engagement with technology, broadening the scope of how digital tools support diverse learning modalities. In a related way, Hofer et al. (2021) introduce the Conditions-based (C♭) Model, which considers both psychological and institutional factors that enable or hinder innovation in digital teaching. Adding a leadership and wellbeing perspective, Kaurav et al. (2023) emphasise the need for supportive structures to manage the demands of digital transformation. Finally, Stark et al. (2025) propose an integrated framework combining ICAP (Interactive, Constructive, Active and Passive learning activities) and TPACK (Technical Pedagogical Content Knowledge) to guide the design of video-based learning, offering a structured approach to align pedagogy with active student engagement.

Learning from International Education Frameworks: Influences, Good Practices and Challenges

Education frameworks across the globe reflect common aims such as coherence, adaptability and inclusion, but are consistently shaped by local priorities. International initiatives like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the OECD Learning Compass 2030 provide high-level guidance by emphasising competencies such as collaboration, sustainability and critical thinking. These meta-frameworks influence national efforts to align qualifications and advance global citizenship (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2020; European Commission, 2020).

National frameworks apply these values in diverse ways. For example, the UK's Quality Code and Australia's Qualifications Framework (AQF) emphasise graduate capabilities and curriculum coherence, while countries such as Germany, South Korea and Costa Rica embed the UN SDGs into national education strategies (Marais et al., 2024). Regional studies also reveal variation in curriculum philosophies. East Asian systems tend to prioritise structure and examination, whereas Scandinavian and German-speaking models favour holistic, skills-based learning. Australasian frameworks often strike a balance, supporting both disciplinary depth and transferable attributes (Cao et al., 2024).

Digital pedagogy frameworks similarly reflect this diversity. The HeDiCom framework (Tondeur et al., 2023), developed across eight European countries, defines shared digital teaching competencies, though implementation varies. Northern systems emphasise critical digital autonomy, while southern ones lean towards tool use and procedural compliance. Zhang and Yu (2023) also show contrasting mobile learning approaches in China and Australia, with the latter integrating it more fully into hybrid models.

Despite such differences, many frameworks demonstrate effective application when coupled with institutional support. UCL's Connected Curriculum (Fung, 2017), Agile Backward Design (Dazeley et al., 2025) and HeDiCom (Tondeur et al., 2023) all show how structured models can be adapted across contexts. The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is another example, promoting regional qualification recognition without enforcing uniformity. In emerging areas like AI, institutions in Australia, South Africa and North America have

developed integrated frameworks blending technical and ethical literacies, reflecting the growing need for socially responsible curriculum design (Marais et al., 2024).

While implementation challenges such as inconsistent uptake or curriculum misalignment (Cheng et al., 2023; Tondeur et al., 2023) remain, international practice highlights that education frameworks work best when they are values-led, context-sensitive and enable faculty to innovate within coherent institutional structures.

Empowering Educators: Building Leadership in Teaching and Learning

Developing Faculty Capability in Leadership in Teaching and Learning

In contemporary higher education, leadership in teaching and learning is increasingly recognised as a capability rooted in everyday academic practice, rather than confined to formal roles. Kinnunen et al. (2024) draw an important distinction between academic leadership, associated with institutional authority and educational leadership, which emerges relationally through teaching, curriculum development and collaboration. This broader perspective aligns closely with leadership in teaching and learning, as understood in this review and allows for leadership to be distributed, dynamic and situated in pedagogical activity itself.

Supporting this shift, several development frameworks stress the interplay between personal values, institutional context and professional growth. The Advance HE Framework (2025), for example, highlights leadership as a contextual and values-led practice, shaped by educators' identities, ethical commitments and institutional priorities. Development models like the UCL Arena (Duhs, 2018) embed mentoring, interdisciplinary exchange and peer learning to support collegial and reflective leadership. These approaches emphasise capability as something cultivated through intentional engagement with both theory and practice, rather than imposed from above.

The importance of relational and reflective learning is also central to Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which Gano and Oxendine (2023) present as a strengths-based model for developing leadership. This framework supports faculty in moving from intuitive, experience-based practice to a more intentional and co-created pedagogical identity. Cao et al. (2024) further expand this view by proposing a four-tiered capability model, ranging from classroom expertise to macro-level curriculum leadership. Their work reflects the increasing demand for faculty who can adapt across domains such as assessment, inclusion, feedback and digital learning design.

Curriculum design plays a central role in leadership capability. The Agile Backward Design (ABD) model developed by Dazeley et al. (2025) reframes curriculum development as an iterative and collaborative leadership process. This model invites educators to align course content with emerging student and societal needs, engage stakeholders and respond flexibly to feedback, thereby positioning faculty as pedagogical leaders through design.

Alongside curriculum design, digital transformation has reshaped what it means to lead in higher education. The Higher Education Learning Framework (HELF) (Osika et al., 2025)

conceptualises teaching as a design-based practice built on cognitive, emotional and identity-based engagement. Educators are called to develop learning environments that are inclusive, intellectually stimulating and student-centred. This view is echoed in newer models of digital leadership, such as Murshed et al.'s (2021) neuro-responsive leadership framework, which centres on feedback systems and learning analytics to guide real-time pedagogical decisions. Zhang and Yu (2023) add a mobile learning perspective, focusing on agility and micro-interaction, while Kravariti et al. (2018) foreground co-constructed, values-led digital leadership based on collaboration and adaptability.

Faculty leadership capability is also deeply intertwined with wider educational values, particularly around sustainability and inclusion. The Education for Sustainability (EfS) framework by Kidman et al. (2019) encourages faculty to embed ecological and social responsibility into the curriculum, thereby positioning educators as agents of transformative change. Yang's (2015) ISEE Framework similarly advocates for self-sustained learning, where leadership involves fostering autonomy, resilience and reflective growth. Biggs and Tang's (2022) Constructive Alignment approach reinforces these values, demonstrating how educators lead through careful planning of learning outcomes and assessment practices that promote coherence and student success.

Partnership with students is another vital dimension. Healey and Healey (2024) argue for Student–Staff Partnerships (SSPs) as a form of distributed leadership, where students co-design curricula and assessments alongside faculty. This model encourages inclusive dialogue, mutual responsibility and shared ownership of the learning process, reframing leadership as co-creation.

Crucially, the institutional culture in which faculty work significantly shapes how educational leadership capability develops. Bartholomew and Curran (2017) caution against models that focus too heavily on managerial control or performance metrics, noting that genuine leadership flourishes in spaces that prioritise trust, critical reflection and dialogue. This is reinforced by Wood and Zuber-Skerritt (2024), whose action leadership model emphasises openness, inquiry and professional agency, locating leadership in care, curiosity and a commitment to meaningful change.

Institutional Enhancement of Leadership in Teaching and Learning: Emerging and Distributed Models

The enactment of teaching and learning frameworks is shaped by a confluence of institutional culture, strategic intent and leadership structures (Evans, 2024; Kinnunen et al., 2024; Advance HE, 2025). While frameworks often articulate inclusive and values-driven goals, their impact depends on how effectively universities embed these principles through governance, development pathways and digital systems (Evans, 2024).

At Maynooth University, the *Student Success Strategy* exemplifies a whole-of-institution approach to inclusive, research-informed education, positioning faculty as agents of pedagogical leadership within curriculum planning and programme design (Maynooth University, 2022). Such strategies do more than set direction; they establish the enabling conditions through which frameworks become practice.

National and cross-sectoral collaborations can also reinforce enactment. In Scotland, the College Development Network (2022) provides a platform for shared curriculum development, centring employability and student agency. In Ireland, the EDIT Toolkit translates values such as equity, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into curriculum design processes, illustrating how tools and systems can operationalise institutional strategy (EDIT Project, 2024).

Leadership in this context is often distributed rather than hierarchical. The Advance HE Framework (2025) promotes a model of leadership grounded in place, people and practice, emphasising community values and academic professionalism. However, the practical influence of such distributed approaches hinges on institutional infrastructure. Systems like curriculum databases, programme design templates and student feedback loops can either enable flexibility and innovation or constrain academic agency through bureaucratic rigidity (Fung, 2017; Kinnunen et al., 2024). Bartholomew and Curran (2017) further argue that authentic leadership depends on trust, collegiality and time; elements often lacking in efficiency-focused environments.

Some universities illustrate what meaningful enactment can look like. Griffith University's efforts to embed climate justice and Indigenous inclusion across both operational and curricular domains reveal how institutional strategy, values and pedagogy can be harmonised to support transformation (Evans, 2024). Similarly, Deakin University's curriculum framework brings together graduate capabilities, design tools and pedagogical values into a coherent institutional model that fosters both academic autonomy and systemic alignment (Deakin University, 2024).

Digital transformation presents both new opportunities and complex challenges. Zhang and Yu (2023) show how mobile pedagogical leadership requires adaptive, feedback-informed teaching design. The HeDiCom framework complements this by linking digital teaching competencies to broader institutional goals such as citizenship and employability (Tondeur et al., 2023). Kravariti et al. (2018) extend this view by proposing a dialogic co-creation model, where faculty-student partnerships are positioned at the heart of pedagogical leadership in digital contexts.

Ultimately, the success of framework enactment lies not in structural design alone, but in the dynamic integration of systems, values and leadership cultures. When these elements align, institutions can cultivate environments where pedagogical leadership is recognised, distributed and sustainably enacted.

Enabling Faculty Agency through Digital and Institutional Synergies

The increasing integration of digital technology in higher education has brought with it new possibilities for empowering faculty as leaders in learning design and innovation. Rather than positioning educators as passive adopters of tools, recent frameworks envision them as proactive co-creators of pedagogical environments that are ethically grounded, technologically responsive and institutionally supported (Tondeur et al., 2023; Stark et al., 2025). These developments underscore a shift towards faculty agency as a dynamic capability shaped through the interplay of digital literacy and institutional culture.

The HeDiCom framework (Tondeur et al., 2023), developed through a collaborative European initiative, exemplifies this trend. It outlines four interlinked domains: teachers' digital practice, student empowerment, digital literacy and professional learning, each offering practical pathways for enhancing educator capacity. What distinguishes HeDiCom is its holistic view. It treats digital engagement not as a technical task, but as a reflective and social process, empowering educators to foster inclusive, future-ready learning spaces.

Similarly, frameworks such as TPACK and ICAP support faculty in integrating technology with content and pedagogy to build cognitively engaging experiences. Stark et al. (2025)

demonstrate how these models guide the creation of interactive video-based learning that aligns with disciplinary values and encourages deeper student engagement. This kind of design-led leadership becomes possible when institutions provide educators with conceptual tools and space for innovation.

At the systems level, institutional environments play a critical role in enabling such leadership. Hofer, Nistor and Scheibenzuber's (2021) Conditions-based (C♭) Model highlights the importance of infrastructure, instructional support and professional development in fostering digital teaching. Rather than seeing institutional systems as constraints, this model frames them as enablers, if designed with flexibility and responsiveness in mind.

Support for digital agency also includes fostering reflective, identity-rich teaching practices. Yang's (2015) ISEE Framework encourages self-sustained learning and professional growth which can be used within digital platforms, positioning faculty as lifelong learners and facilitators of student inquiry. Redmond et al. (2018) extend this by showing that effective online pedagogy must attend not only to cognitive engagement, but also emotional, collaborative and social dimensions, where institutional support for community-building and dialogue can make a substantial difference.

Ethical and inclusive design are also increasingly central to digital leadership. Reyna et al. (2018) advocate for a critical approach to digital media literacy that empowers faculty to evaluate, produce and embed multimedia content intentionally and accessibly. Marais et al. (2024) further highlight the ethical imperatives of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into teaching, calling for values-based approaches that centre equity and learner agency. Institutions that encourage thoughtful experimentation and provide space for dialogue around these themes can help faculty lead with confidence and clarity.

There are also opportunities to align digital innovation with local student needs and teaching contexts. Zhang and Yu (2023) illustrate how mobile pedagogical frameworks enable educators to design flexible, micro-responsive learning activities tailored to students' lived experiences. This kind of agility is best supported when institutional systems and feedback channels are responsive and collaborative.

Murshed et al. (2021) add another dimension by introducing neuro-responsive teaching, where faculty use real-time learning data to adapt instruction dynamically. Such innovations signal a growing potential for institutions to equip educators with meaningful analytics tools that support reflective and adaptive practice.

The importance of professional trust and co-creation is reinforced in Kravariti et al.'s (2018) model of dialogic leadership. They argue that digital transformation flourishes in cultures where teaching is not only supported through systems, but shaped collaboratively through relationships between colleagues, students and institutional leaders. When institutions actively invest in such relational infrastructure, they help educators enact leadership that is principled, relational and future-facing.

These frameworks and models affirm that faculty agency is not an isolated endeavour. It is cultivated through digital tools, pedagogical frameworks and crucially, the enabling strategies, values and structures of the institutions they work within. By aligning digital and institutional supports, universities can create the conditions for educational leadership that is innovative, inclusive and sustainable.

How Frameworks Shape Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice

Enabling Curriculum Coherence and Flexibility

In contemporary higher education, curriculum frameworks play a strategic role in translating institutional values into actionable, coherent academic programmes (University of Exeter, 2021; University of Hull, 2021). Building on institutional and pedagogical leadership (Evans, 2024; Advance HE, 2025), these frameworks provide the design scaffolding through which educational priorities, such as inclusion, flexibility and employability are enacted (Ryan et al., 2020; Greenwich, 2021; University of the West of Scotland, 2023).

The emphasis on coherence across programme structures is evident in models such as the University of Reading's Curriculum Framework, which advocates for alignment across modules and structured feedback loops that promote constructive engagement between staff and students (University of Reading, n.d.). Similarly, the University of the West of Scotland (2023) foregrounds co-created curriculum and anti-racist pedagogy, embedding inclusive assessment design and meta-skills such as collaboration and critical thinking across all levels of study.

A values-led approach is also central to frameworks such as HELF, which encourages the design of emotionally and cognitively engaging learning environments. It promotes metacognition, contextual learning and identity development as foundational to holistic student growth (Nugent et al., 2019). This aligns with other UK models from Greenwich (2021) to Bedfordshire (2023), which integrate sustainability, wellbeing and personalisation as core features of learning.

Frameworks are not just pedagogical, they are institutional strategies for collective design. TU Dublin's CoCREATE Framework exemplifies this by building curriculum collaboratively across stakeholders, centring values like flexibility, partnership and authenticity (Ryan et al., 2020). Similarly, the University of Edinburgh's Curriculum Transformation initiative supports structural alignment through the use of templates and archetypes, promoting interdisciplinary and inclusive learning (University of Edinburgh, 2024).

Frameworks like the Connected Curriculum (Fung, 2017) and Bristol Futures (University of Bristol, 2022) go further by positioning students as co-researchers and civic participants, integrating inquiry and global challenges into disciplinary teaching. This shift from transmission models to participatory design highlights a broader commitment to pedagogical innovation, positioning the curriculum as a space where educational leadership can be actively exercised.

Design models such as Backward Design (Wiggins & McTighe in Poorvu Center, n.d.) continue to underpin many of these frameworks. Lam (2024) and Travers et al. (2019) build on this approach by incorporating spiral curriculum logic and competency mapping, allowing learning to be scaffolded progressively. Meanwhile, scholars like Bartholomew and Curran (2017) have advocated for assessment-led curriculum development, arguing for outcomes and evaluation to be embedded from the outset, rather than post hoc additions.

Increasingly, universities are embedding equity, justice and sustainability at the heart of curriculum planning. The University of Hull's Inclusive Education Framework (2021),

Southampton Solent University's IRWC model and Exeter's Transformative Education Framework (2021) all reflect this reorientation, framing curriculum as a mechanism for cultivating global citizenship and ethical engagement. Similarly, the Sustainable HE Futures and Lumina Learning frameworks call for strategic, iterative and interdisciplinary design anchored in both institutional priorities and global benchmarks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Together, these frameworks reflect a shift in higher education from fragmented curriculum design toward integrated, values-driven approaches that empower educators as strategic designers of learning.

Supporting Pedagogical Innovation through Curriculum Design

Recent shifts in teaching and learning emphasise shaping the conditions for student engagement, rather than merely transmitting content. Pedagogical innovation, in this view, is not about adopting new tools for novelty's sake but about aligning values, design principles and student participation within curriculum structures that support sustained inquiry, flexibility and real-world relevance (Osika et al., 2025; Sahni et al., 2025).

Frameworks like the Higher Education Learning Framework (HELF) reflect this shift by encouraging metacognitive development, social engagement and emotionally intelligent design (Osika et al., 2025). Its emphasis on situated learning and structured feedback highlights how curriculum decisions shape students' capacity for deep, connected learning. Similarly, digital frameworks such as HeDiCom foreground faculty agency in designing ethical, co-constructed learning environments, moving beyond tool-centric adoption to focus on relational engagement, critical use of technology and adaptive feedback (Tondeur et al., 2023).

Sahni et al. (2025) highlight that successful digital transformation in higher education depends on multiple interconnected factors, including institutional culture, leadership, faculty readiness and investment in digital infrastructure. They argue that innovation must be cultivated through supportive systems. This view is echoed in Zhang and Yu's (2023) model of mobile pedagogy, where micro-interactions and fluid delivery modes empower contextual adaptation and student co-design.

The repositioning of educators as intentional designers is extended by Stark et al. (2025), who integrate the ICAP model to map learning tasks to engagement levels, encouraging video-based and blended learning to be designed around cognitive richness and interactivity. Their approach reminds us that innovation is pedagogical first, technical second, requiring disciplinary alignment and reflective practice.

Student–staff partnerships add a further layer of pedagogical renewal. Healey and Healey (2024) frame these partnerships as engines of mutual learning and content co-creation, enhancing curriculum relevance and breaking down hierarchical assumptions. Shala (2018) likewise emphasises passion-based learning, where project-based tasks allow students to integrate personal interests with academic goals, promoting autonomy and relevance.

Agile approaches such as Dazeley et al.'s (2024) Backward Design model operationalise innovation through iterative curriculum cycles. Educators implement, gather feedback and refine in real time, ensuring that content remains responsive to student and disciplinary

needs. This responsiveness is also emphasised in the ISEE framework, where Yang (2015) advocates for self-sustained learning grounded in identity development and dialogue.

Finally, innovative frameworks such as those developed by Bartholomew and Curran (2017) and Redmond et al. (2018) stress that pedagogical change must be emotionally and institutionally supported. Whether through values-based tools (e.g., Viewpoints) or engagement heuristics (e.g., the Online Engagement Framework), these approaches argue for infrastructure that facilitates innovation rather than prescribing it.

Hence, the most impactful frameworks support pedagogical innovation by enabling faculty to reimagine teaching through responsive design, collaborative culture and institutional support.

Aligning Frameworks with Programme-level Design and Diverse Pedagogies

Contemporary curriculum frameworks increasingly aim to foster coherence between institutional values and programme-level implementation, emphasising adaptability, inclusivity and pedagogic intentionality (Advance HE, 2025; University of Reading, n.d.). These frameworks are designed to inform course design in a way that reflects the needs of diverse learners and disciplines. They encourage academic teams to think beyond modular silos and consider the student journey holistically, including the integration of interdisciplinary and research-rich learning (Fung, 2017; Davies & Fung, 2018).

The Connected Curriculum (Fung, 2017) highlights the importance of aligning learning activities and assessments with broader graduate outcomes, while strengthening the ties between research and teaching. It also positions students as active participants in knowledge creation. Similarly, the Lumina Learning Framework promotes the definition of outcomes in terms of essential capabilities such as ethical reasoning and collaboration, with an emphasis on clarity and relevance across institutional contexts (Travers et al., 2019). This alignment ensures that programme-level curricula not only meet academic standards but also reflect societal and workforce expectations.

Institutional frameworks, such as those at the University of Reading (n.d.) and Southampton Solent University (2024), further demonstrate how diverse pedagogies ranging from collaborative learning to personalised assessment, can be embedded at programme level to support flexible, student-centred approaches. Cheng et al. (2023) reinforces the need for intentional transitions across the student experience, encouraging curriculum models that scaffold learning in response to the complexities of change and development.

Pedagogical leadership plays a key role in bridging the gap between high-level frameworks and programme delivery. Bartholomew and Curran (2017) emphasise the importance of translating institutional approaches into practice through collaborative leadership, where curriculum teams share responsibility for curriculum enhancement. This view is echoed in institutional strategies, which increasingly recognise curriculum as a space for academic leadership, innovation and identity (University of Bedfordshire, 2023; College Development Network, 2022).

Frameworks that support programme-level alignment also incorporate tools such as Backward Design (Mills, Wiley & Williams, 2019) and Agile Backward Design (Dazeley et al., 2025), which offer structured approaches to mapping intended outcomes, learning activities

and assessments in a way that ensures coherence and transparency. These models encourage reflection on what students need to achieve and how learning environments can be intentionally designed to support those goals.

Aligning frameworks with programme-level design involves both strategic and pedagogical considerations. Effective models support diverse pedagogies by articulating clear outcomes, enabling inclusive and responsive teaching, and embedding leadership within the academic process. Such alignment enhances the coherence, relevance and adaptability of the curriculum in a changing higher education landscape.

The Role of Frameworks in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Embedding Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Teaching and Learning Leadership

Embedding equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within teaching and learning leadership in higher education demands a systemic, multidimensional approach. It is not solely about increasing access or representation but about reshaping the structural, relational and epistemic foundations of academic practice. A foundational model in this space is Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which proposes that teaching and assessment should be designed to accommodate learner variability from the outset. By advocating flexibility across the modes of engagement, representation and expression, UDL supports diverse cognitive, linguistic, cultural and physical needs through proactive rather than reactive strategies (CAST, 2024; Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.). In doing so, it establishes an inclusive design baseline embedded into the learning environment itself.

This structural framing is enriched by frameworks such as Appreciative Inquiry, which reframe inclusion from a deficit-remedying process to one that is asset-based and co-creative. Gano and Oxendine (2023) conceptualise inclusive teaching as inherently dialogic, grounded in mutual respect and in the amplification of student voice and lived experience. Their model calls for learning environments that prioritise emotional safety and interpersonal trust as integral to inclusive pedagogy. This moves inclusive leadership beyond procedural compliance toward an ethos of shared purpose, empathy and deep collaboration.

Leadership frameworks also increasingly recognise EDI as an enacted, everyday practice rather than a stated aspiration. The Advance HE Framework (2025) positions leadership as reflexive, ethical and relational, calling on educators to model inclusion not only through curriculum decisions but through self-awareness, systems thinking and culturally responsive engagement. Inclusion, in this framework, becomes a principle that shapes institutional culture and pedagogical identity alike.

A compelling institutional example is provided by Evans (2024) in her analysis of the Inclusive Futures Beacon at Griffith University. This initiative embeds inclusive leadership structurally by co-designing curricula with people who have lived experiences of disability. It represents a shift from unilateral to collaborative design, promoting distributed leadership and reciprocal learning among faculty, students and community stakeholders.

At the course design level, Biggs and Tang's (2022) constructive alignment model supports inclusion by ensuring coherence between intended learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessments. When used intentionally, this model helps eliminate implicit bias in evaluation and supports fairness in how students demonstrate their knowledge and progress. Such alignment is deeply ethical, reinforcing clarity and procedural equity.

Yang's (2015) ISEE Framework similarly embeds collaboration and inclusion into the learner–teacher relationship. It emphasises relational pedagogy, in which learning arises through dialogue, responsiveness and the instructor's attentiveness to students' lived realities. Inclusion, here, is a dynamic infrastructure for sustained engagement.

In the digital sphere, inclusive practice requires awareness of both technological potential and social-emotional dynamics. Redmond et al. (2018) argue that inclusive online learning environments must be intentionally designed to foster belonging and visibility, particularly when digital formats risk isolating learners. Stark et al. (2025) extend this with their work on participatory video design, demonstrating how students can act as co-creators rather than passive recipients, thus broadening what inclusion means in digital pedagogy.

Frameworks such as those by Kravariti et al. (2018) and Wood and Zuber-Skerritt (2024) push the conversation further into the realm of epistemic justice. Kravariti et al. focus on power-sharing through partnership models that challenge hierarchical structures and expand curricular agency. Wood and Zuber-Skerritt, meanwhile, advocate for knowledge democracy; the recognition and integration of Indigenous and experiential knowledges into mainstream curricula. These perspectives deepen the scope of EDI by asking not only who is included, but also whose knowledge counts.

Technological advancement brings new opportunities and ethical challenges. Marais et al. (2024) warn against assuming neutrality in AI and digital tools. While AI can support multilingualism, accessibility and adaptive learning, it also risks reinforcing structural biases if built without inclusive design principles. Hofer et al. (2021) indicate that institutional assumptions about digital access and fluency often obscure real disparities, highlighting the need for pedagogy that is responsive to students' contexts and capabilities.

Together, these frameworks and models affirm that inclusive leadership in teaching and learning is neither a checklist nor a siloed responsibility. It must be understood as a values-driven, institution-wide commitment that spans curriculum design, assessment, pedagogy and technological practice. The literature consistently highlights that successful inclusion requires structural flexibility (UDL, Constructive Alignment), relational trust and co-creation (Appreciative Inquiry, Inclusive Futures) and epistemic breadth (ISEE, Knowledge Democracy), alongside critical awareness of digital and systemic inequalities. In this light, EDI emerges not as an optional initiative, but as a foundational principle of transformative pedagogical leadership.

Embedding Sustainability through Curriculum Design and Institutional Practice

Sustainability in higher education is increasingly approached as a guiding principle that shapes institutional values, pedagogical decisions and student development. Rather than being treated as an optional enhancement, it is becoming embedded within curriculum structures and leadership practices (UNESCO, 2020; Sterling, 2013). Pedagogical frameworks now encourage learning that fosters systems thinking, ethical reasoning and active student agency (Barth et al., 2007).

Fung's (2017) Connected Curriculum provides a compelling model by linking research-based education to public engagement. Through interdisciplinary inquiry and societally relevant assessment, this framework positions students not only as learners but as contributors to sustainable futures. It exemplifies how sustainability can be interwoven into the learning experience through the very structure of academic programmes.

Bartholomew and Curran (2017) further critique traditional curriculum processes that rely on inflexible documentation formats, arguing that such approaches often overlook meaningful engagement with students and external stakeholders. They propose reimagining curriculum as a dynamic and participatory process that values multimodal evidence such as portfolios and interviews, enabling learning to respond to the complexities of contemporary challenges. Their T-SPARC and Viewpoints projects demonstrate how curriculum enhancement can be aligned with institutional goals through inclusive, process-led approaches. Instead of rigid directives, these initiatives build structures that support co-constructed development, facilitating change through dialogue and distributed leadership (Bartholomew & Curran, 2017).

A similar perspective is offered by Evans (2024), who calls for sustainability models that are responsive to local contexts. Her concept of an ecosystemic approach argues that institutions should balance global sustainability goals with regional needs and knowledge systems. Rather than prescribing universal templates, this view encourages adaptability and context-sensitive leadership.

At the pedagogical level, Biggs and Tang's (2022) principle of constructive alignment reinforces the need to design learning outcomes, assessments and activities in a coherent structure that reflects sustainability principles. This ensures that students engage with real-world ethical and environmental issues through meaningful and integrated academic pathways. Yang's (2015) ISEE framework builds on this by framing sustainability as a capacity developed through experiential learning and critical reflection. Her model centres student growth as a relational and inquiry-driven process, making sustainability an intrinsic aspect of how knowledge is co-created in classrooms.

Similarly, the Education for Sustainability (EfS) theoretical framework, a five-phase model outlined by Kidman et al. (2019) presents sustainability education as a cycle of continuous improvement. It begins with curriculum mapping and educator development, progresses through phases of experimentation and implementation and culminates in reflective redesign. Its emphasis on iteration and student agency makes it particularly effective for embedding sustainability across disciplines and learning levels.

The interconnection between sustainable education and digital transformation is also gaining attention. Sahni et al. (2025) emphasise that sustainable teaching practices must be underpinned by digital resilience, infrastructural readiness and inclusive access, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. Their work highlights how sustainability must be reinforced through both technological agility and institutional responsiveness.

Global guidance from UNESCO (2020) supports this integrated vision by outlining core competencies for ESD. These include futures literacy, systems thinking and collaborative problem-solving skills that require strategic alignment across faculty development, programme design and institutional leadership.

Taken together, these perspectives show that sustainability is most effective when treated as a central organising principle rather than a peripheral objective. Whether through structural

alignment, institutional flexibility or reflective pedagogy, sustainability is increasingly recognised as essential to the purpose and practice of higher education.

Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving EDI and ESD

Achieving meaningful progress in EDI and ESD presents both institutional challenges and rich opportunities for pedagogical and cultural transformation. As higher education evolves, these goals are increasingly viewed as mutually reinforcing pillars of inclusive, future-focused learning instead of isolated initiatives.

A major opportunity lies in the integration of EDI and ESD within curriculum frameworks that foster interdisciplinarity, agency and real-world application. Fung's (2017) Connected Curriculum illustrates how these priorities can be embedded at programme level, using student-led research and societal engagement to cultivate critical thinking and civic responsibility. By aligning disciplinary learning with broader ethical and environmental issues, this model enables institutions to promote both inclusion and sustainability through coherent curriculum structures.

Institutions such as the University of the West of Scotland and the University of Liverpool have demonstrated how distributed leadership and collaborative course development can operationalise inclusion (University of Liverpool, 2022; UWS, 2023). Through co-creation and stakeholder engagement, these frameworks empower academic teams to develop teaching that is both values-led and discipline-sensitive. They show that institutional ambition for EDI and ESD can be aligned with and even enriched by academic diversity, rather than imposed upon it.

Co-design has become a powerful enabler of transformation. The University of Edinburgh's Curriculum Transformation Programme (University of Edinburgh, 2024), the Inclusive Education Framework at the University of Hull (2021) and the University of Greenwich's Curriculum Framework (2021) exemplify how engaging students, staff and community voices fosters relevance and shared purpose. These participatory approaches shift curriculum enhancement from compliance to co-ownership.

Optimism is also found in models that embed inclusive and sustainable principles structurally. The Transformative Education Framework at Exeter (2021) aligns racial justice and sustainability with leadership practice, while the EDIT Toolkit (2024) provides practical design supports that turn institutional values into everyday pedagogy. Similarly, the Bristol Futures Framework (University of Bristol, 2022) offers a replicable process of iterative design, anchored in student agency and civic engagement.

Challenges remain particularly in ensuring that inclusion goes beyond representation and sustainability beyond content. Scholars such as Wood and Zuber-Skerritt (2024) urge curriculum designers to engage with epistemic justice by embedding Indigenous and community-based knowledge systems. Their call for knowledge democracy reframes curriculum as a site for pluralism and transformation instead of standardisation.

Innovative initiatives such as TU Dublin's CoCREATE project (Ryan et al., 2020) show that these ideals are achievable when institutions invest in partnership-based leadership. By inviting students and staff to co-develop values and learning principles, the project fosters relational trust and curricular relevance. Frameworks like Sustainable HE Futures (Evans, 2024) further reinforce the importance of aligning policy, infrastructure and cultural change to sustain EDI and ESD systemically.

Ultimately, the growing landscape of inclusive and sustainable curriculum practice reveals a sector-wide readiness for change. With thoughtful design, responsive leadership and engaged faculty, EDI and ESD can move from aspirational principles to lived institutional realities, enriching both teaching and learning in the process.

Aligning Frameworks with Institutional Goals

Understanding the Impact of Teaching and Learning Frameworks

Determining whether teaching and learning frameworks lead to meaningful educational change involves more than analysing grades or monitoring institutional targets. Instead, impact must be understood in broader terms through how learning is experienced, how leadership in teaching and learning is enacted, and how values such as equity and student agency are woven into academic life (Cheng et al., 2023; Redmond et al., 2018). This shift reflects a growing consensus that impact is best captured by asking what kinds of transformation frameworks enable and for whom (Gano & Oxendine, 2023; Osika et al., 2025).

Frameworks that embrace learning as a developmental and affective journey offer a clearer lens through which to understand impact. The Higher Education Learning Framework (HELF), for example, draws attention to metacognition, emotional development and learner identity as essential outcomes of teaching, going beyond surface performance metrics (Osika et al., 2025). This signals a reframing of success as something rooted in how learners think, feel and grow. Such a reframing is also evident in how institutions are embedding inclusion and belonging into everyday educational practice. At the University of Reading and University of Liverpool, inclusivity is treated not as an add-on but as a structural design principle. Their frameworks place accessibility, representation and learner voice at the heart of curriculum and assessment, broadening what is valued and who is included in definitions of academic success (University of Liverpool, 2022; University of Reading, n.d.).

Where frameworks are strongly aligned with institutional strategy, impact becomes more than aspirational; it becomes operational. At the University of Edinburgh and Southampton Solent University, for instance, values such as cultural responsiveness and civic engagement are not simply stated in strategic documents but also embedded into programme-level outcomes and inclusive assessment practices. In doing so, these institutions demonstrate how curriculum logic can reflect institutional ethos (University of Edinburgh, 2024; Southampton Solent University, 2024).

In an increasingly digital landscape, emerging frameworks are also asking new questions about interaction and responsiveness. The Neuro Control Teaching and Learning Framework, for instance, integrates real-time data to adjust pedagogy based on student engagement patterns (Murshed et al., 2021). While technologically advanced, such approaches also raise questions about how ethical, relational and human-centred these responsive systems truly are.

Beyond the structural and technological, impact is increasingly being understood through the lens of student transitions and academic growth. Studies by Cheng et al. (2023) and Shala (2018) suggest that the ability of students to navigate academic uncertainty, transitions and

moments of challenge is a powerful indicator of curricular success. Impact, in this sense, is about guiding students to achievement through development.

Faculty leadership plays a crucial enabling role. When frameworks like Backward Design are used to tightly align outcomes, teaching and assessment, they help create spaces where students take ownership of their learning and develop critical thinking capacities (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Mills et al., 2019). This alignment also offers educators a platform for demonstrating pedagogical intent and coherence.

More recent literature has expanded the lens of impact to include emotional, social and collaborative dimensions. Models such as ICAP (Stark et al., 2025) and the engagement framework developed by Redmond et al. (2018) offer ways of recognising engagement through peer collaboration, intellectual risk-taking and interpersonal exchange which are factors that are often difficult to quantify but essential to learning depth.

In addition, frameworks such as Appreciative Inquiry (Gano & Oxendine, 2023) and Yang's ISEE model (2015) show that faculty development and identity formation are themselves outcomes of teaching practice. Appreciative Inquiry developed by Gano and Oxendine (2023), is a strengths-based approach. It encourages collaborative reflection and supports educators in developing their professional identities. Yang's ISEE model (2015) promotes inquiry-based, scaffolded and dialogic learning. It emphasises student autonomy and the relational nature of teaching. These frameworks suggest that leadership in teaching and learning is not only a question of what is delivered but how educators grow as facilitators, collaborators and reflective practitioners.

Creativity and real-world readiness are also emerging as central measures of impact. Frameworks that promote student agency, like passion-based learning (Shala, 2018) or digital literacy models (Reyna et al., 2018), emphasise what students can do, produce and apply and not just what they know. This aligns with a broader shift toward preparing graduates for complexity, change and lifelong learning.

These perspectives suggest that teaching and learning frameworks generate impact when they shape culture, enable growth and reflect the lived realities of faculty and students alike. The most effective frameworks make this impact visible not only through formal evaluation, but in the everyday acts of inclusive, intentional and transformative education.

Aligning Leadership in Teaching and Learning with Institutional Goals

Achieving meaningful alignment between institutional strategy and faculty leadership in teaching and learning is neither automatic nor uniform. While nearly all universities declare student success, inclusivity and employability as strategic priorities, the degree to which these values are embedded in actionable, pedagogically rich curriculum frameworks varies widely. Critical examination reveals that alignment succeeds only when teaching and learning leadership structures are supported by practical tools, faculty agency and opportunities for contextual adaptation.

Frameworks such as the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework (ICDF) at the University of Limerick (2023) and Deakin University's Curriculum Framework (2022) demonstrate the operationalisation of institutional values through faculty development structures, curriculum hubs and programme-level design principles. What distinguishes these models is their commitment to supporting curriculum transformation through resourced implementation. University of Limerick's ICDF, for instance, moves beyond goal-setting by specifying roles (e.g. Curriculum Development Leads) and proposing infrastructural supports.

A complementary, yet distinctly different approach can be seen at James Cook University where the curriculum model embeds inclusivity, employability and Indigenous perspectives directly into its programme-level planning, showcasing how institutions can enact strategic commitments without diluting disciplinary integrity. This alignment is deepened by the presence of guidance documents that scaffold curriculum teams through the entire design lifecycle. Yet even here, critical tensions persist between standardisation for accountability and the need to preserve disciplinary and cultural nuance.

The Transformative Education Framework (TEF) at the University of Exeter and the Inclusive Real World Curriculum (IRWC) framework at Southampton Solent University show that alignment can also be achieved by embedding values like sustainability, social justice and civic engagement into learning outcomes. These initiatives position faculty as moral agents shaping student worldviews. However, they also demand a fundamental shift in how institutions conceptualise leadership, not as top-down enforcement of metrics, but as shared, reflective practice.

Equally important are those frameworks that draw attention to the limitations and tensions involved in aligning leadership practices with educational institutional priorities. As highlighted by Kinnunen et al. (2024), leadership is increasingly shaped by ideas associated with New Public Management, such as efficiency and accountability. In this context, the focus of leadership may shift more towards administrative priorities and potentially limit opportunities for more pedagogically grounded developmental approaches. Similarly, Evans (2024:32) calls for institutions to define their "true north", a strategic compass rooted in authentic values that connects local identity with global responsibility.

Importantly, frameworks such as Advance HE's (2025) model for Leading in Higher Education and Tondeur et al.'s (2023) HeDiCom Framework underscore that institutional alignment is not simply a matter of goals and metrics, but of cultural coherence. These models elevate leadership as a multidimensional, values-driven and relational act. Yet they require complementary mechanisms, toolkits, mentoring structures, reflective evaluations, to embed their principles into everyday curriculum practice.

Where strategic alignment becomes most convincing is in institutions that connect leadership in teaching and learning development, student transitions and curriculum design within an integrated model. For example, Cheng et al. (2023) and Travers et al. (2019) show that backward design, mapping student pathways to learning outcomes and teaching strategies enhances both retention and professional preparation. These efforts are successful when institutions acknowledge that leadership in teaching and learning is layered, requiring synchronisation between individual faculty decisions, departmental cultures and overarching institutional missions.

Effective alignment between faculty practice and educational institutional priorities depends on designing frameworks that position faculty as co-creators of institutional identity. This alignment develops through iterative dialogue, adaptive feedback and mutual accountability between policy and pedagogy.

Evaluating What Matters in Teaching and Learning Frameworks

Evaluation is a core pedagogical practice that shapes how teaching and learning are experienced, understood and improved. Rather than relying on linear or compliance-driven metrics, many emerging frameworks advocate for evaluative approaches that are formative, reflective and aligned with institutional values such as inclusion, transformation and student agency. A variety of evaluation strategies have been explored, from small-scale contextual

tools to digital and narrative-driven models, all of which attempt to assess what truly matters in terms of the quality of learning, the depth of engagement and the ethical purposes of education.

Formative and Contextual Evaluation

Huber's (2017) Small-project Evaluation in Learning and Teaching (SPELT) framework is one of the few models explicitly designed for small-scale academic initiatives. Initially a 12-step model, it was refined into a pragmatic 6-step version via participatory action research, explicitly addressing faculty frustration with overly complex evaluation structures. SPELT prioritises formative over summative evaluation, introducing elements such as reflective prompts, stakeholder mapping and dissemination planning. Importantly, Huber critiques the conflation of evaluation with either research or reporting, arguing instead for embedded evaluative literacy that enhances academic agency and pedagogical reflexivity.

Leadership Outcomes and Institutional Culture

The Advance HE Framework for Leading in Higher Education reconceptualises impact through a blend of quantitative and qualitative dimensions, linking leadership effectiveness not just to outputs (e.g., progression rates), but to culture-building, inclusive environments and long-term societal contribution. By reframing evaluation around cultural influence and institutional coherence, it challenges the reliance on linear performance metrics.

Constructive Alignment as Evaluative Logic

Biggs and Tang (2022) reassert the principle of constructive alignment, positing that assessments must act as valid indicators of intended graduate outcomes. When implemented institution-wide, this alignment transforms assessments into strategic levers for institutional success, rather than checkpoints for student achievement. This model encourages curricular evaluation that reflects pedagogic intent and highlights what student attainment reveals about their capabilities and growth.

Evaluating in Hybrid and Digital Contexts

The C♭ Framework by Hofer et al. (2021) introduces a nuanced model for evaluating digital teaching, integrating metrics like self-regulation, emotional engagement and technological efficacy. These factors push evaluation beyond basic performance indicators, acknowledging the complex relational and infrastructural realities of hybrid learning. Similarly, Murshed et al. (2021) deploy neural networks to deliver adaptive, real-time pedagogical feedback, treating the classroom as a dynamic feedback ecosystem where evaluation occurs continuously rather than post-hoc.

Reconceptualising Success through Learner Dispositions

Yang's (2015) ISEE framework offers an alternative to grade-based impact measurement, focusing on the cultivation of self-sustaining learners. This framework emphasises identity formation, autonomy and dialogic inquiry as core evaluative domains. It shifts the axis of success from compliance to transformation, asking not "What did the student achieve?" but "Who did the student become?", a philosophical reorientation of educational impact.

Metrics for Emotional and Social Engagement

Redmond et al. (2018) provide a five-dimensional framework to evaluate student engagement across cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social and collaborative dimensions. These reflect affective signals of belonging, motivation and intellectual ownership, key indicators of strong connection between students and the curriculum. Evaluation, then, becomes a relational process, grounded in rich and insightful student experience.

Qualitative and Narrative Metrics

Gano and Oxendine (2023) advocate for narrative-based evaluation using Appreciative Inquiry, where faculty reflection, identity formation and emotional outcomes (hope, resilience) are legitimate indicators of teaching impact. Their model defies the dominance of performative metrics by valuing the story of teaching as data, inviting a richer evaluative language.

Reclaiming Evaluation as Pedagogical Practice

Despite the centrality of evaluation in educational frameworks, robust evaluative design is too often an afterthought, introduced post-implementation rather than integrated from the outset. Huber (2017) identifies this as a persistent issue that limits developmental learning, while Kinnunen et al. (2024) caution against the dominance of institutional metrics such as KPIs and retention rates, which risk distorting educational priorities toward performativity. Reclaiming evaluation as a pedagogical practice means shifting its focus from proving effectiveness to improving learning and from tracking outputs to understanding change. This reframing invites institutions to design evaluation tools that are responsive to context, co-created with educators and students and grounded in the relational, reflective and transformative aims of higher education.

Learning from Framework Implementation

The successful implementation of educational frameworks depends on their design but also on how effectively values are translated into everyday teaching practice. Research shows that meaningful impact is more likely when student agency, inclusion and institutional mission are embedded in the process from the outset.

In many models, learning has been reframed as a socially engaged practice. Fung's (2017) Connected Curriculum illustrates this shift by encouraging real-world outputs such as public reports or community projects as part of student assessment. Similar priorities are reflected in international frameworks like UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (2020) and the Sustainable HE Futures Curriculum (2024), where interdisciplinarity, sustainability and reflection are central pillars.

Local adaptation has also been emphasised. At Griffith University, curriculum structures have been aligned with values of Indigenous engagement and climate action (Evans, 2024). These practices highlight how innovation can be fostered when institutional values guide implementation, rather than being imposed through standardisation.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. Many frameworks have been critiqued for privileging compliance and efficiency over depth and meaning (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2024). The risk of performative inclusion has also been noted, where inclusive language is used without structural or epistemic change (Bartholomew & Curran, 2017). Tools like the EDIT Toolkit (2024) have been developed to support this gap by offering inclusive design practices and templates.

Gaps in faculty capacity, leadership culture and evaluation practices also limit effectiveness. While models such as the ISEE (Yang, 2015) and EfS (Kidman et al., 2019) offer strategies for reflective and values-driven teaching, adoption often falters due to resource constraints and lack of professional development. Digital frameworks like C♭ (Hofer et al., 2021) and critiques by Kaurav et al. (2023) further stress the need for emotional readiness and strategic clarity in technological transformation. Measurement remains another concern. Reliance on grades and module evaluations often misses the developmental and relational aspects of learning. More holistic models emphasising engagement, identity and growth have been proposed (Redmond et al., 2018; Travers et al., 2019) but remain underused.

Effective implementation, therefore, relies on adaptation of values-based practices instead of replication. Frameworks are more likely to achieve meaningful, lasting change when they are embedded within local contexts and supported by trust, co-creation and leadership.

Conclusion

This literature review explores how contemporary teaching and learning frameworks support inclusive, values-led and strategically aligned curriculum design across higher education. A central finding is the growing emphasis on frameworks that are both structured and flexible, offering clear institutional guidance while remaining adaptable to diverse disciplines, pedagogies and student needs. Across case studies and models, success is increasingly defined by the capacity to embed principles such as equity, sustainability, student agency and digital transformation in ways that are locally meaningful and educationally coherent. Rather than enforcing rigid standards, the most effective frameworks create enabling conditions for reflective practice, collaborative design, cultural responsiveness and enhanced leadership in teaching and learning. Ultimately, the review affirms that impactful frameworks do not merely direct practice, but cultivate conditions for long-term transformation, grounded in shared values and responsive to institutional and social change.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

This review is focused on education and curriculum frameworks that support leadership to enhance teaching and learning practices and improve institutional outcomes in higher education. The methodology follows a structured process to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, relevant and credible sources.

Research Design

This literature review is designed to examine how educational and curriculum frameworks can be used as vehicles for enhancing teaching and learning in higher education. While leadership in teaching and learning emerges as a key dimension, the primary focus is on how frameworks enable pedagogical innovation, curriculum development and institutional alignment. The review adopts a thematic analysis approach to synthesise insights from both theoretical and empirical literature, categorising findings into cross-cutting themes relevant to curriculum design, faculty development, inclusive pedagogy and educational sustainability.

Rather than positioning leadership as the sole or central object of inquiry, the review explores how frameworks can support distributed and relational leadership through their implementation, particularly in ways that strengthen faculty agency, embed EDI and ESD priorities and respond to institutional goals for curriculum coherence and enhancement.

This design ensures that the literature review remains responsive to the evolving research questions while maintaining a focus on the practical and developmental potential of frameworks to enhance teaching and learning in context-specific, evidence-informed ways.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic search of peer-reviewed literature was conducted to identify relevant studies on education and curriculum frameworks, curriculum design, and leadership in teaching and learning in higher education. To ensure extensive coverage of high-quality scholarly sources, multiple academic databases and search engines were utilised. A detailed list of the databases searched, selected journals and specific search terms, including Boolean combinations, is provided in the Appendix.

Search Approach

The search strategy was structured to capture both theoretical and empirical research related to education and curriculum frameworks, and leadership in teaching and learning higher education. It included:

- A broad database search across interdisciplinary and education-specific repositories.
- A targeted journal search focusing on leading publications in higher education research and leadership in teaching and learning.
- A keyword-based search using carefully selected terms and Boolean combinations to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature.

To refine the search results, additional modifiers such as good practices, case study, model, evaluation, assessment and policy were applied, ensuring both theoretical insights and applied perspectives were included.

Rationale for Search Approach

This structured search approach was designed to:

Ensure comprehensive coverage: By incorporating core concepts, pedagogical practices and outcomes focused on leadership in teaching and learning, the review captures a broad yet relevant range of studies.

Align with strategic priorities: The inclusion of themes such as inclusion (EDI), experiential learning, digital literacy and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) reflects key priorities in contemporary higher education research.

Maintain quality and relevance: The focus on peer-reviewed sources, recent publications and robust methodologies ensures a strong evidence base for the literature review.

To ensure the selection of high-quality and relevant literature, a structured set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied. These criteria were designed to refine the search results, ensuring that only the most pertinent studies related to education and curriculum frameworks, teaching and learning leadership, and higher education practices were included.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To further enhance the robustness and academic rigour of this literature review, a time-bound selection criterion was implemented, focusing primarily on sources published within the last 10 years (2015–2025). This timeframe ensures that the review captures the most recent developments, contemporary debates and evolving trends in leadership in teaching and learning, curriculum frameworks and higher education pedagogy. Given the dynamic nature of educational policies, faculty leadership models and curriculum design innovations, prioritising recent literature ensures relevance to current institutional practices and emerging pedagogical frameworks.

While the majority of selected studies fall within the 2015–2025 range, seminal works predating this period were included where necessary, particularly in cases where foundational theories remain influential and continue to be widely cited in recent research. However, preference was given to newer studies that build upon and extend these foundational frameworks, ensuring that the literature review remains current, evidence-based and aligned with recent advancements in faculty development and curriculum innovation.

By applying these structured selection criteria, this literature review ensures that only high-quality, methodologically sound and thematically relevant research is incorporated, maintaining academic integrity and a well-defined scope.

Data Extraction and Analysis

The selected literature was analysed using a systematic coding process to identify recurring themes and patterns related to education and curriculum frameworks supporting leadership in teaching and learning. Data were extracted and organised into the following thematic categories:

Theme 1: Theoretical Foundations and Models of Educational Frameworks

Theme 2: Development of Educator Capabilities for Teaching and Learning Enhancement

Theme 3: Impact on Curriculum Design and Pedagogical Innovation

Theme 4: Promoting EDI and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Theme 5: Institutional Outcomes and Strategic Alignment

Quality Assessment

To ensure academic rigor and credibility, the review adhered to the following:

- Relevance: Alignment with the research's objectives.
- Credibility: Peer-reviewed status of the source.
- Methodological rigour: Use of qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method approaches in the reviewed studies.

Limitations

- Publication bias: The review is limited to English-language publications, potentially omitting valuable insights from non-English studies.
- Evolving nature of Higher Education: Education and Curriculum frameworks are continuously evolving and newer models may emerge beyond the scope of this review.
- Lack of empirical studies: Some theoretical frameworks may lack direct empirical validation, requiring further research.

Databases Searched

- Emerald Insight
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
- Google scholar
- IEEE Xplore
- JSTOR
- ProQuest Ebook Central
- ResearchGate
- Scopus
- SpringerLink
- Taylor & Francis Online
- Wiley Online Library

Repositories Searched

- Advance HE
- CAST
- EDUCAUSE
- European University Association (EUA)
- Government of Ireland/Department of Education
- Helsinki University Press
- Higher Education Authority (HEA)

- Maynooth University
- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)
- Technical University Dublin (ARROW)
- Universities Official teaching and learning sites

Journals Searched

- Benchmarking: An International Journal
- Computers in Human Behaviour
- Education Technology Research and Development
- E-learning and Digital Media
- IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference Proceedings
- Interactive Learning Environments
- International Journal for Academic Development
- Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education
- Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice
- New Directions for Student Services
- Online Learning
- Teaching and Learning Inquiry
- Teaching in Higher Education

Appendix 2: Search Terms & Boolean Combinations

Core Concept Terms:

- "Education Frameworks in Higher Education"
- "Higher Education Curriculum Frameworks"
- "Curriculum Frameworks"
- "Teaching & Learning Leadership"
- "Leadership Development in Education"
- "Academic Leadership"
- "Teaching and Learning in HE"
- "Teaching and Learning Frameworks"
- "Learning Frameworks"
- "HE Learning Frameworks"
- "Leadership in Transformative Pedagogical Methods"

Outcome and Process Terms:

- "Curriculum Design"
- "Curriculum Innovation"
- "Pedagogical Practices"
- "Pedagogical Innovation"
- "Instructional Leadership"/"Pedagogical Leadership"/"Learning-centred Leadership"/"Leadership for Learning"/"Student-centred Leadership"
- "Inclusive Teaching"
- "Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)"
- "Sustainable Educational Practices"
- "Digital Literacy in Higher Education"
- "Experiential Learning"
- "Transparent Teaching and Learning Methods (TILT)"
- "Leadership in Transformative Pedagogical Methods"

Inclusivity and Equity:

- "Inclusivity in Higher Education"
- "Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)"
- "Inclusive Curriculum"

Sustainability & Digital Transformation:

- "Sustainable Educational Practices"
- "Digital Literacy"
- "Experiential Learning"
- "Education for Sustainable Development"

Institutional Impact:

- "Institutional Outcomes"
- "Strategic Alignment in Education"

Example Boolean Combinations:

- "education framework" AND "teaching and learning leadership"
- "education framework" AND "teaching & learning leadership" AND "curriculum design"
- "curriculum design" AND "leadership development" AND "higher education"
- ("inclusive teaching" OR "equity diversity inclusion") AND "education framework"
- ("inclusive curriculum" OR "EDI") AND "higher education" AND "leadership development"
- "experiential learning" AND "curriculum innovation" AND "leadership"
- "digital literacy" AND "higher education" AND "curriculum design"
- "digital literacy" AND "education frameworks" AND "sustainable practices"

Additional Modifiers:

- Used terms like "good practices" "case study" "model" "evaluation" "assessment" and "policy" to further narrow or expand search.

Rationale:

- Comprehensive Coverage: The combination of core and outcome-focused terms ensured that the search covers both the structural aspects of education frameworks and the specific leadership outcomes (e.g., enhancing curriculum, inclusivity, digital literacy and sustainability).
- Alignment with Strategic Priorities: Including terms related to inclusivity (EDI), experiential learning and digital literacy directly reflects the strategic themes outlined in the Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023-2028.
- Quality and Relevance: By specifying publication types, date ranges and methodological quality, less relevant or outdated research are filtered out, focusing on literature that informs current practice and policy.