



Analysis of the Implementation of the Love Curriculum Replacing the Independent Curriculum in Madrasah

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Abstract: The Independent Curriculum, implemented nationally since 2022, is viewed as not fully meeting the needs of Islamic education, which prioritizes the development of students' spiritual, moral, and practical character. In the Madrasah context, a curriculum model is required that more explicitly integrates values of compassion, empathy, and love for God, fellow human beings, and the environment. Responding to this gap, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia introduced the Love Curriculum as an alternative and corrective initiative to strengthen the value-based dimensions that are considered lacking in the Independent Curriculum. This article aims to analyze the implementation of the Love Curriculum as a substitute for the Independent Curriculum in Madrasah. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, involving interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis in selected educational institutions that have begun adopting the curriculum. The results indicate that the Love Curriculum effectively revitalizes the humanistic and transformative essence of Islamic education and contributes to the development of students' noble character, social sensitivity, and spiritual awareness. Nonetheless, its implementation faces several challenges, including teacher readiness, the integration of values into lesson plans, and the monitoring of classroom practice. Therefore, continuous professional development and supportive policies are recommended to ensure the Love Curriculum becomes embedded in the learning culture of Madrasah in a consistent and sustainable manner.

Abstrak: Kurikulum Merdeka yang diadopsi secara nasional sejak 2022 dinilai belum sepenuhnya menjawab kebutuhan pendidikan Islam yang menekankan pembentukan karakter spiritual dan afektif peserta didik. Dalam konteks madrasah, dibutuhkan pendekatan kurikulum yang lebih menanamkan nilai kasih sayang, empati, serta cinta kepada Tuhan, sesama, dan lingkungan. Menyikapi hal tersebut, Kementerian Agama RI menggagas Kurikulum Cinta sebagai alternatif dan upaya korektif untuk memperkuat dimensi nilai yang dinilai belum optimal dalam Kurikulum Merdeka. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum Cinta sebagai pengganti Kurikulum Merdeka di madrasah. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui wawancara, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi pada satuan pendidikan yang mulai menerapkannya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kurikulum Cinta mampu menghidupkan kembali nilai pendidikan Islam yang humanis dan transformatif, serta berkontribusi pada pembentukan akhlak mulia, kepedulian sosial, dan kedekatan spiritual siswa. Namun, implementasi masih terkendala kesiapan guru, integrasi nilai dalam RPP, dan monitoring pelaksanaan. Studi ini merekomendasikan pembinaan berkelanjutan dan dukungan kebijakan agar Kurikulum Cinta benar-benar mengakar dalam budaya pembelajaran madrasah.

A. Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a medium for character formation and strengthening religious values. In the context of increasingly rapid globalization and modernization, the education system must strike a balance between academic competence and the development of students' morals. In the midst of this flow of change, the Merdeka Curriculum was born as a form of national education reform. This curriculum offers flexibility and project-based learning to encourage student creativity and independence (Ginting & Prastowo, 2023; Akhmadi, 2023; Simarmata & Mayuni, 2023).

However, in practice, the Independent Curriculum does not consider addressing the specific needs of Islamic education, especially in Madrasah. Many Islamic education units experience a gap between the spiritual objectives of the curriculum and its practical implementation. Religious and moral values often receive a disproportionate portion in the learning design (Akbar et al., 2023; Ramah & Rohman, 2023). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers face challenges in integrating the values of compassion and spirituality deeply into the learning outcomes established by the Independent Curriculum.

This condition raises concerns about the erosion of fundamental values in Islamic education, particularly at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level, which is a crucial foundation in shaping student character (Ramadhani et al., 2023). In various Madrasahs, it was found that learning activities were still mechanical and normative, not yet able to touch the practical side of students as a whole. As a result, the relationship between teachers and students tends to be rigid, the learning process becomes less meaningful, and religious education is confined to a routine without appreciation (Alami & Najmudin, 2023).

In response to these conditions, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs initiated the Love Curriculum, which is based on the values of compassion (rahmah), empathy, and love for God, fellow human beings, and the universe. This curriculum not only improves the structure of learning content but also emphasizes a relational approach between teachers and students. With love as the guiding value, the Madrasah will be able to form a more spiritual, humanistic, and transformative learning environment (Syaripudin & Hasna, 2025; Sahin, 2022).

The implementation of the Love Curriculum is explicitly directed to replace the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of religious education in Madrasah. However, this transition process is not without challenges. There is a gap between the idealism of the curriculum and readiness at the technical and cultural levels of the school (Zainab, 2020; Ifendi, 2025). Teachers need assistance in understanding the concept of love pedagogically, as well as in integrating it into their lesson implementation plans (RPP) and class activities.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to evaluate and analyze the extent to which the Love Curriculum has been implemented in real terms in the madrasah context. This study is important for mapping the achievements, obstacles, and strategies employed during the curriculum transition process. In addition, this study also contributes to

providing policy recommendations and the development of learning models based on love values in Islamic education.

Thus, this study aims to address crucial issues in the transformation of contemporary Islamic education, specifically, how to develop a curriculum that is not only intellectually rigorous but also resonates with the heart and shapes the soul. The Love Curriculum is expected to be the answer to the need for a more spiritual, inclusive, and comprehensive curriculum in addressing the challenges of 21st-century education.

Islamic education in Madrasah is required not only to produce cognitively intelligent students, but also to have noble morals and intense spirituality. However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Madrasah is considered technocratic and has not fully touched on the practical and spiritual aspects of students (Nada & Listiana, 2025; Hadi & Hidayat, 2024; Syakur, 2025).

To address this void of values, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia initiated the Love Curriculum as an educational innovation based on compassion, empathy, and love for God, others, and the environment. This curriculum is designed to address the weak spiritual dimension that was present in the previous curriculum. This innovation offers a more relational and transformative educational approach, with the value of love at its core. The reason for choosing the Love Curriculum as a solution is that it addresses the most profound aspect of Islamic education: the development of a noble heart, soul, and behavior, rather than merely transferring knowledge (Maryam et al., 2022).

This study differs from previous studies, which generally focus only on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum or character building through a general approach. This study specifically aims to analyze the implementation of the Love Curriculum as a form of curriculum transformation based on spiritual and compassionate values in Madrasah, and to identify challenges and strategies in the process of transitioning from the Independent Curriculum. The general objective of this study is to provide an empirical and analytical description of how the values of love are internalized in the practice of Islamic religious learning in Madrasah, as well as to measure their effectiveness in shaping students' character (Laila et al., 2023; Karwadi & Indrawan, 2023; Ramedlon et al., 2023).

The general objective of this study is to provide an empirical and analytical description of how the values of love are internalized in the practice of Islamic Religious Education learning in madrasahs, as well as to measure the effectiveness of this approach in forming the character of students who are noble and have spiritual depth. Specifically, this study aims to identify the achievements, obstacles, and strategies for implementing the Love Curriculum as a transformative alternative to the Merdeka Curriculum, while also developing a more contextual and humanistic curriculum model. By presenting the dimension of love as a curricular approach, this study contributes to strengthening the discourse of Islamic education based on affection and relational values, as well as opening up new opportunities in developing Islamic education theories and practices that are more

in touch with the spiritual aspects of students and answer the needs of 21st-century education, especially in the madrasa environment.

B. Method

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Love Curriculum as a replacement for the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic religious education in madrasas. The research was conducted at one of the Private Elementary Madrasas in Bengkalis Regency. The research subjects consisted of 10 people, including Islamic Religious Education teachers, madrasah principals, and students in grades IV and V. In addition, supporting informants, including homeroom teachers, non-PAI teachers, and madrasah committees, were also involved to enrich the data and context. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The researcher acts as the primary instrument, being directly involved in the process of collecting and reflecting on data in the field for two months during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. Data validity is maintained through triangulation of techniques and sources, as well as member checks to ensure the validity of interpretations. Data analysis is carried out by including data reduction, data presentation, and verification/conclusion, all of which are thematically and repeatedly presented. The results of the analysis are presented reflectively and contextually in order to depict a complete reality and can be scientifically accounted for.

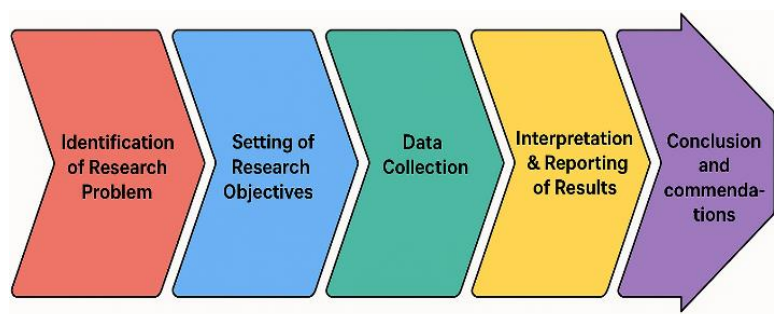


Figure 1. Research Flow

C. Result

The Role of the Educational Environment in Supporting the Implementation of the Love Curriculum

The results of observations and interviews indicate that a friendly, inclusive, and empathetic educational environment plays a crucial role in supporting the successful implementation of the Love Curriculum. For example, joint activities such as classroom cleanliness, greening movements, and social services carried out by all members of the Madrasah serve as a medium for strengthening the values of compassion and empathy among individuals.

A warm, open, and cooperative educational environment plays an important role in shaping the moral and social development of students. In the context of the Love

Curriculum, a supportive and harmonious madrasah atmosphere encourages students to more easily internalize the values of compassion in everyday life. This finding also supports the statement in the Guide to Implementing a Love-Based Curriculum (Ningrum & Andriyani, 2023) that a madrasah atmosphere that fosters compassion is a key indicator of the curriculum's success. An environment filled with a spirit of family and concern will strengthen the affective learning process, which is the core of the Love Curriculum.

When compared with Alimuddin (2023) study, a match is found between Madrasahs with a positive and cooperative social environment and their greater success in implementing a value-based curriculum approach. In contrast, research by Nasution (2023) found that the implementation of a character-based curriculum in schools with a competitive and individualistic culture encountered significant obstacles.

Therefore, the results of this study align with previous theories and research, while reinforcing the fundamental assumption that the environment is a strategic element in love-based education. This confirms that the success of the Love Curriculum is not only determined by the teaching method, but also by the madrasah ecosystem as a whole.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Love Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education Learning

Perception Aspect	Number of Students Who Agree	Total Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Feel appreciated by teachers	18	20	90.0
The classroom atmosphere is more comfortable	18	20	90.0
Interested in taking Islamic Religious Education lessons	17	20	85.0
Enjoy activities that involve empathy	19	20	95.0

The table above shows that the majority of students responded positively to the implementation of the Love Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning. As many as 90% of students reported that the classroom atmosphere became more comfortable, and 95% stated that they were satisfied with activities that fostered empathy, such as sharing positive experiences and promoting mutual respect. Additionally, 90% of students felt appreciated by their teacher, and 85% expressed interest in taking Islamic Religious Education lessons, indicating a stronger emotional connection between teachers and students. However, only 75% stated that they understood the value of compassion in everyday life, indicating a need to strengthen the internalization of values through habituation outside the classroom. Overall, these data show that the affective approach in the Love Curriculum can create a warmer and more meaningful learning climate, and strengthen the theory of Islamic education based on compassion as developed in the 2025 Indonesian Ministry of Religion policy.

Teachers' Strategies in Integrating Love Values in Islamic Religious Education Learning

Based on the results of participatory observations of the learning process in grades IV and V, researchers noted that teachers actively build warm interactions with students through affective opening activities. One teacher began the lesson with a warm greeting and a joint prayer, accompanied by phrases such as: "*Children, today we are learning not only to be smart, but also to be children who love each other.*" (Observation, June 8, 2025).

From in-depth interviews with Islamic Religious Education teachers, information was obtained that the value of love is integrated through various methods. One teacher stated: "*In my Islamic Religious Education module, I always write down the goals of attitudes, such as fostering affection between friends or appreciating God's creations. For example, when learning about commendable morals, I ask the children to write a message of love for their friends or family.*" (Interview, Islamic Religious Education Teacher, June 8, 2025)

This approach was also recorded in the Islamic Religious Education learning module analyzed by the researcher. In one document of Class IV, in the core activities section, the teacher includes the activity of telling the story of the Prophet Muhammad as a method to instill the value of compassion in interacting with young children. At the end of the learning, students are invited to write personal reflections about their experiences helping others.

The interpretation of this practice shows that the teacher's strategy is not normative, but instead based on affection and relationships. The teacher not only conveys religious material but also guides students emotionally through methods such as positive affirmations, dialogue, and reflective activities. This aligns with the humanistic pedagogical approach, which provides a significant space for personal relationships in learning.

Challenges of Implementing the Love Curriculum in Madrasah

In an interview with the head of the Madrasah, obstacles were found in the stage of understanding the concept of love values. The head of the Madrasah said: "*We have never received direct training from the Ministry of Religion on how to technically implement the Love Curriculum. Teachers end up improvising on their own.*" (Interview, Head of Madrasah, June 8, 2025). Meanwhile, another teacher stated: "*To be honest, I am still confused about distinguishing between love values and ordinary morals. If there is no standard guide, we just guess from what we understand.*" (Interview, Grade V Teacher, June 8, 2025)

This result is reinforced by the documentation of teaching materials, where some teachers still use the old learning module and only add the phrase "love values" without significant changes to the approach. The interpretation of these findings reveals that the challenges of implementation extend beyond formal policies to include the readiness of human resources and systemic support. Teachers require technical guidance, practical examples, and a school environment that fosters changes in teaching paradigms.

Transformation of Learning Values in the Perspective of the Love Curriculum

From the observation analysis in class IV, the researcher documented learning activities that transformed abstract material into concrete experiences. When discussing the theme of helping one another, the teacher gave an assignment: "Students, this week we are making a love box. Whoever sees their friend sad or needs help, you can write a message and put it in the box." (Class Observation, June 8, 2025). This assignment was continued with a class discussion that touched the students' feelings. One student wrote: "I am sad because my father is sick, but I am happy because my friend gave me a letter that said 'you are strong.'" (Student assignment documentation, June 08, 2025)

The teacher also began to provide affect-based assessments, such as observing students' empathy and honesty, in addition to cognitive outcomes. This can be seen from the teacher's assessment notes, which include the aspects: "Showing a caring attitude, being active in assisting, respecting friends who have different opinions." The interpretation reveals a shift in values from a normative approach to a participatory and affective approach. Teachers no longer rely on memorizing arguments, but instead relate the material directly to students' lives, adopting a value-experiential pedagogy approach.

D. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of the Love Curriculum in Madrasah represents a significant shift from a cognitive and normative learning orientation towards a more relational, affective, and value-based educational approach. The positive classroom atmosphere, increased student engagement, and strengthened spiritual awareness indicate that compassion-centered learning creates a meaningful and transformative learning experience. These results strengthen Sahin's (2022) proposition that love-based pedagogy humanizes the learning process and enhances student emotional well-being. The findings also align with the view that affective-based Islamic education fosters not only intellectual development but also the cultivation of noble character and empathy, which are essential pillars of Islamic pedagogy.

This study reinforces earlier research by Alimuddin (2023) and Ramedlon et al. (2023), which emphasized that values-based learning is most effective when supported by a school environment that embodies the values being taught. The strong student responses recorded in this research confirm that a learning setting rooted in empathy, mutual respect, and emotional safety serves as a fertile ground for internalizing love-based values. The teacher strategies observed in this study—such as affective lesson openings, reflective activities, storytelling, and relational mentoring—illustrate a pedagogical shift from didactic and normative instruction toward experiential value internalization. These practices affirm Ifendi's (2025) argument that implementing the Love Curriculum requires teachers to reposition themselves as emotional and spiritual mentors, rather than merely transmitters of knowledge.

A notable contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how love-based values can be operationalized in classroom practices beyond theoretical discourse. The

integration of compassion in planning, instruction, and assessment shows that value internalization is most effective when students are directly engaged in meaningful experiences, reflection, and interpersonal interactions. This distinguishes the present study from previous works, which largely examined either the limitations of the Merdeka Curriculum or general approaches to character education without offering a grounded model for relational and affective value implementation.

Despite these promising findings, several challenges emerge that hinder the optimal realization of the Love Curriculum. The lack of teacher readiness, limited conceptual understanding, and minimal technical guidance result in inconsistent implementation. Some teachers merely insert “love values” into lesson plans without changing their teaching orientation, suggesting symbolic compliance rather than substantive transformation. These challenges validate the concerns raised by [Nada & Listiana \(2025\)](#), who found that curriculum innovation in Madrasah often faces obstacles at the practical level due to insufficient training and unclear operational guidelines. This indicates a gap between the curriculum’s philosophical intent and its classroom-level execution.

The discussion highlights the importance of viewing the Love Curriculum not simply as a pedagogical reform but as a systemic cultural transformation. Its sustainability requires institutional support, continuous professional development, and leadership commitment to cultivating a school culture grounded in affection, spirituality, and relational values. Thus, teacher training must focus not only on content mastery but also on modeling empathy, reflective practice, and emotional literacy. Without cultural reinforcement at the institutional level, the curriculum risks remaining an ideal concept rather than becoming a deeply rooted educational practice.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing discourse on affective-based Islamic curriculum transformation by providing empirical evidence that love-centered pedagogy can strengthen students’ character formation and spiritual development. It also underscores the need for strategic policy support and structured implementation guidelines to ensure that the Love Curriculum develops into a sustainable learning culture across Madrasah settings, rather than a temporary instructional trend.

E. Implications

The results of this study provide a significant contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic education discourse, especially in the dimension of value-based curriculum. The findings that demonstrate the Love Curriculum can foster a more effective, humanistic, and spiritual learning climate confirm that religious education is not only relevant in the cognitive and normative domains, but also in the effective domain, which encompasses interpersonal relations and character formation. This implication supports the strengthening of the theory of effective pedagogy in Islamic education, while also broadening the scope of curriculum implementation from mere knowledge transfer to relational transformation.

Theoretically, the results of this study confirm the need for a curriculum paradigm that is not only oriented towards achieving technical competencies, but also emphasizes the experience of values in learning. Thus, this study not only strengthens the position of the Love Curriculum as a new approach in madrasah education but also encourages a revision of the curriculum approach that is too structural and trivializes the role of relationships, affection, and spirituality in the educational process. In a scientific context, these findings provide an empirical basis for developing an affection-based Islamic curriculum model that can be further tested in various other Islamic educational units.

F. Limitation and Suggestion for Further Research

This study has several limitations that need to be considered in assessing the validity and scope of generalization of the results. First, the scope of the study was limited to one private Madrasah in Bengkalis Regency, so that the findings cannot be directly generalized to all madrasah contexts in Indonesia that have different socio-cultural and institutional backgrounds. Second, the qualitative descriptive research approach allows for in-depth exploration, but does not provide quantitative data that can statistically strengthen the relationship between variables. Third, the relatively short duration of the study did not allow for longitudinal observation of the long-term impact of implementing the Love Curriculum on the formation of students' character as a whole.

Based on these limitations, it is recommended that further research be conducted with a broader coverage of locations and involving both state and private Madrasahs in various regions. Further research can also incorporate quantitative approaches, such as experiments or surveys, to assess the relationship between the implementation of the Love Curriculum and measurable changes in student attitudes or character indicators. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the consistency and long-term effectiveness of implementing the Love Curriculum on school culture and the internalization of Islamic values in students.

G. Conclusion

The implementation of the Love Curriculum in Madrasah demonstrates a fundamental shift in the orientation of Islamic Religious Education learning, from an approach that focuses on transferring material to a process that emphasizes emotional relationships, fosters affection, and promotes the formation of values of compassion in everyday life. Teachers' strategies in compiling and implementing love-based learning activities reflect the reconstruction of the role of educators as spiritual and emotional guides, not just conveyors of information. Students' responses to this approach show increased learning comfort, active involvement in class, and growing awareness of the importance of empathy and togetherness. The supportive madrasa environment, as well as the principal's encouragement in building a culture that aligns with the value of love, also became strengthening factors in the success of implementing this curriculum at the elementary level.

The implementation of the Love Curriculum can serve as a conceptual basis for developing a more effective and humanistic Islamic education model. Continuous strengthening of teacher capacity is needed through affect-based pedagogical training and the provision of learning tools that support more focused internalization of values. Institutional practices also need to be developed by building a school culture that reflects the value of love through habituation activities and collaborative programs. This idea offers a new direction for the renewal of Islamic education, one that not only enlightens the mind but also touches the soul, rooted in both divine and human values. Further studies can be directed to reach a broader institutional context and a methodological approach that can describe long-term and profound changes in values.

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