



Curriculum-Based Love as Innovative Learning in Madrasahs

Herdiana ^{1*}, Ratna Sari ¹, Fauzan Siregar ¹

¹ Islamic Education Management Master's Program, Sultanah Nahrasiyah State Islamic University Lhokseumawe, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The Love-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta, KBC) is a revolutionary policy initiative rolled out by Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs and officially launched on 24 July 2025 to present a more humanistic, inclusive and spiritually grounded model of madrasah education. The implementation of this curriculum at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level has its own challenges and opportunities, given the need to address the developmental characteristics of elementary school children. The study adopts a literature review approach to explore the policy framework and implementation of KBC in MI drawing on previous research and official policy documents. KBC is based on the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 1503/2024 and the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education No. 6077/2025 based on 46 sources formed on five core values (Panca Cinta), namely love for God, knowledge, self and others, the environment, and the homeland. The results of the study show that the implementation of KBC can improve character building, reduce intolerance, improve empathy, and promote students' learning independence. But there remain hurdles around teacher preparedness, lack of resources and pushback against change from traditional ways of teaching. The study concludes that KBC's effectiveness largely depends on the teachers' capacity as role models, humanistic administration and supervisory support, and integration of immersive learning, blended learning and child-friendly digital technologies.

1. Introduction

The multidimensional crisis afflicting Indonesian education today is far more serious than the problems of limited access or less-than-ideal learning outcomes. At a more basic level, this crisis is about a deepening moral decay, less empathy, growing intolerance in social and religious life. Acts of dehumanization, symptomatic of a declining sense of love for fellow human beings, for religious values, and for the environment, continue to intensify at local, national, and global levels (Sodik et al., 2025). With the acceleration of digitalization, the younger generation has been increasingly literate in digital technology (Susilo et al., 2026). However, this generation has a great difficulty in developing empathy and social responsibility in real-life situations. Such circumstance emphasizes the urgency

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: herdiana960@gmail.com

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for a radical change in the educational trajectory: not only transmitting religious knowledge but also stimulating the wider application of humanistic values(Rakhmawati et al., 2026).

In order to answer this challenge, on July 24, 2025, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia officially launched the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC), which is a fundamental breakthrough in the national education landscape that places love as the foundation of education and learning(Abrori & Hadi, 2020). Not a new subject, but an approach to Islamic education based on the conscious development of love from an early age, a love for Allah SWT, for fellow human beings, for the environment, and for the nation(Abdullah et al., 2026). The curriculum is formulated with emphasis on the development of student character, experiential learning and increased attention to the social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning (Decree of the Director General of Islamic Religious Education No. 6077 of 2025 on Guidelines for the Love-Based Curriculum)(Mashuri & Rahman, 2026).

The introduction of the Love-Based Curriculum has generated renewed enthusiasm for building superior and dignified madrasas. This curriculum also represents a strategic step toward reviving the spirit of Islamic education as rahmatan lil 'alamin—a mercy to all creation(Suryadi et al., 2026). These values of love are integrated across all subjects, encompassing both religious disciplines such as Aqidah, Akhlak, and Fiqh, as well as general subjects such as Indonesian Language and Social Studies(Sahab & Cholid, 2026). In this way, learning extends beyond cognitive development to also cultivate students' humanitarian and spiritual values(Nur et al., 2026). Amid the national-level implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum, Aceh Province—known for its strong Islamic culture and values—has responded positively to this initiative(Dewi et al., 2024). Aceh Besar Regency, for instance, has implemented the curriculum across madrasas at all levels of education(Alfianingsih et al., 2026).

Since the official launch of the Love-Based Curriculum, more literature has been generated around it. However, the literature is mostly descriptive and policy-oriented(Nikmah & Nusaibah, 2025). These studies mainly address the conceptual basis, regulatory framework, and the implementation of the curriculum in secondary and tertiary madrasahs(Marpaung & Dahlan, 2026). The early childhood years are a very crucial period for the formation of character, empathy, and moral values which are precisely the outcomes that the curriculum is trying to develop(Sa'adi, 2025). However, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to its application at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level(Ansori et al., 2026). Furthermore, the expanding and diverse body of policy documents, official guidance and empirical evidence around KBC implementation has yet to be systematically synthesized in the extant literature(Hamidalloh et al., 2026). This leaves practitioners and policymakers without a coherent understanding of the curriculum's opportunities and challenges at the elementary level(Mashuri & Rahman, 2026). This is an especially important gap given the developmental characteristics of MI students, including concrete modes of thinking, reliance on experiential learning, and heightened sensitivity to role-modeling(Akip et al., 2025) which necessitate different pedagogical strategies than those appropriate for older learners(Azizi et al., 2026).

To fill this gap, the current study presents a systematic literature review to explore the policy framework and implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in the MI context(Rahman et al., 2025). Based on 46 literature sources, including peer-reviewed studies, official policy documents, and ministerial decrees, this study seeks to (1) clarify the regulatory and conceptual foundations of KBC, (2) analyze the results and effects of its implementation in MI settings, and (3) identify the key challenges and enabling factors that determine its successful implementation at the elementary level(Sumadi & Huda, 2025). The current study aims to synthesize the existing evidence to contribute to a theoretical understanding of love-based pedagogy in early Islamic education as well as provide

practical insights that could inform teachers, madrasah administrators, and policymakers to strengthen KBC implementation at the foundational level of madrasah education.

2. Methodology

The study employs literature review method, which involves systematic gathering, reviewing and analyzing relevant written sources. The aim of this research is to develop conceptual argument and to make analytical conclusion on the implementation of Love-Based Curriculum as a learning innovation, especially in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah context. This approach was chosen as the research is not about collecting direct field data, but rather, it is about the development of ideas and theoretical perspectives in relation to the Love-Based Curriculum, religious moderation and pedagogical innovation in madrasah education.

The literature search was conducted in academic databases and indexing platforms, such as Google Scholar, SINTA (Science and Technology Index), and Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital) using combinations of keywords such as “Love-Based Curriculum,” “Kurikulum Berbasis Cinta,” “madrasah ibtidaiyah,” “character education in madrasah,” and “humanistic Islamic education.” These searches were supplemented by manual tracing of government publications and institutional repositories, as well as to ensure comprehensive coverage of policy documents not indexed in academic databases.

The sources were selected by considering three main criteria: relevance to the Love-Based Curriculum or closely related concepts (i.e., religious moderation, character education, humanistic pedagogy in madrasah settings), credibility with a preference for peer-reviewed journal articles, official government decrees, and publications from reputable institutions, and novelty with a preference to sources published within the last five years (2020–2025), given the recency of the policy under study. Sources that were purely opinion-based, lacked institutional or academic credibility, or discussed curriculum implementation outside the madrasah context were excluded. The initial search yielded about 80 potentially relevant sources, of which 46 were included in the final analysis following screening for relevance, duplication and credibility. These included policy documents issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, guidelines for madrasah curriculum, religious and educational literature, national and international scientific journals, previous research on learning innovation at the MI level, and articles from reputable media outlets. In addition to the study’s focus on the madrasah context, the analysis also includes written research reports, madrasah institutional profiles, and local policy documentation.

The analysis employed is descriptive-interpretive analysis. The approach describes the findings of the selected literature first, and then interprets and explains them to answer the research questions about the form, implementation, and impact of the Love-Based Curriculum in learning practice (Habsy, 2017). The study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of Love-Based Curriculum as a relevant learning innovation carried out in madrasah education through this literature-based analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Conceptual Foundations and Objectives of the Love-Based Curriculum

Madrasahs have tried to implement active, creative and fun learning through a curriculum that is appropriate to the developmental stages of students. As a pedagogical innovation, the Love-Based Curriculum does not aim to replace the Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum but complement it by enriching the learning process through the integration of humanitarian values and compassion. The approach aims at evolving a humanistic, nationalistic, environment conscious, tolerant generation which considers love as the basic principle of life. This emphasis is especially significant because elementary school students are in a developmentally sensitive period in which they readily absorb values and behaviors from their environment.

Thus, the Love-Based Curriculum can be an effective way to develop a love for others, nature and religion from an early age, conceptually and in practice.

In July 2025, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia launched the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) as a policy to solve the continuing humanitarian crises in the education system. The birth of this program is the increasing concern that education has become too much focused on cognitive achievement at the expense of students' spiritual and emotional development. The launching of KBC by the Minister of Religious Affairs, Nasaruddin Umar, was a paradigm shift. Education was no longer seen as the transfer of knowledge, but as a holistic process oriented toward the humanization of the learners.

The Love-Based Curriculum conceptual framework is based on the core Islamic teachings which place love at the center of the prophetic mission. The curriculum is designed to be inclusive and to provide opportunities for students to share experiences and deepen their understanding of diversity. Values such as compassion, tolerance, empathy and social justice are systematically and sustainably cultivated from an early age. Ultimately, KBC wants to change the education system to create humanistic, nationalistic, environmentalist and tolerant people with love as the basis for life (Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education No. 6077 of 2025 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Based on Love).

3.2 Conceptual Foundations and Objectives of the Love-Based Curriculum

Curriculum is etymologically derived from the Latin curriculum which means course or path. It originally refers to the arrangement of sequence of subjects. However, this traditional understanding is considered as too narrow, which concentrates only on the instructional content and ignoring the learning experiences and the whole student development. From a contemporary viewpoint, curriculum is seen as a Learning Plan encompassing knowledge, learning experiences, and character formation. Therefore, curriculum design must be flexible, integrated, and following the development of students so that the educational objectives can be achieved holistically (Regulation of the Director General of Islamic Religious Education No. 6077 of 2025 concerning Guidelines for the Love-Based Curriculum).

The Love-Based Curriculum is founded on five dimensions of love: love for Allah and the Prophet, love for knowledge, love for the environment, love for fellow human beings and love for the homeland. The five dimensions together form a multidimensional framework that integrates the spiritual, social and intellectual dimensions of learning. The potential of this curriculum to address humanitarian concerns on the local level is extended strategically to larger global concerns. The curriculum offers a feasible alternative to reducing social conflict, discrimination and injustice in various contexts by integrating the values of compassion and tolerance in the process of learning. In this sense, the Love-Based Curriculum is a strategic step toward a more peaceful, harmonious and civilized world, based on mutual love and respect between human beings.

3.3 Policy and Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The Love-Based Curriculum policy was officially established through the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 1503 of 2025, while the technical guidelines were elaborated in the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education No. 6077 of 2025, issued on 22 July 2025. The curriculum is designed to support the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045 by developing a generation that is intellectually capable, has integrity, and shows strong empathy. Its purpose goes beyond the transmission of knowledge, to the development of love, solidarity and environmental responsibility, at all educational levels, from elementary school to university. The Love-Based Curriculum has been embraced widely in different regions, especially in Aceh Province. The curriculum is a targeted form of religious education that is intended to create a love for God, others, environment, and the nation from an early age through integration into existing subjects, not the addition of new subjects, said the Head of the Aceh Besar Office of Religious Affairs. In North Aceh, an equally strong commitment has also been directed to strengthening the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers through KBC, so that high-achieving, character-driven PAI educators are produced continuously. The implementation of the curriculum has also been informed by conceptual guidance from Management of Love

as a Hidden Curriculum in Madrasahs, which explores strategies for embedding the value of love in the education of madrasah students as a hidden curriculum, emphasizing compassion, empathy, and tolerance as integral elements of the teaching and learning process in shaping student character. When compared to the Merdeka (Freedom) Curriculum, it is found that they have a similar philosophical basis as both accord importance to humanistic values, spirituality and freedom of thought. This convergence has opened the opportunity for a pedagogical model that integrates empathy, compassion, and independent learning within an Islamic ethical and spiritual framework—a synthesis model with love-based education at its core, surrounded by four interrelated dimensions: Freedom to Learn, Spirituality, Humanity, and Pedagogical Innovation.

The application of the Love-Based Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah has been adjusted to the developmental stages of elementary school children by employing a variety of pedagogical strategies. Learning at this level relies heavily on games, habit formation and creating a child-friendly, inclusive learning environment. The approach taken is cross-curricular, i.e. the values of love are integrated throughout all subjects and not presented as a separate subject. One of the main methods used is deep learning; found that this method, in the context of the Love-Based Curriculum, encourages students to think critically and creatively while relating course material to real-life experiences, thereby strengthening character, empathy, and tolerance and creating a harmonious and humanistic learning environment.

Blended learning has also been suggested as a strategy for KBC implementation. Conducted research on the integration of blended learning with KBC. The results showed that the integration of the two approaches has the potential to develop a learning model that balances the academic and affective dimensions, especially for young learners in Islamic elementary schools. The study notes that effective blended learning design must take into account the warmth of pedagogical relationships, family support, teacher readiness, and age-appropriate use of technology. Another characteristic of the implementation of KBC is meaningful learning.

3.4 Challenges and Obstacles in Implementing the Love-Based Curriculum

The main obstacle in the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is the readiness of teachers in understanding the concept and mastery of teaching methods. the problem was caused by the dominant conventional learning paradigm, the low ability of teachers and the inflexibility of curriculum structure. They argue that to address this challenge, teacher capacity should be enhanced through reflective pedagogy training, curriculum modification that emphasizes the values of love and compassion, project-based and empathy-driven learning, and a holistic evaluation system that encompasses cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. Similarly, the adoption of Love-Based Curriculum with digital media has the potential to generate more interactive learning experiences; however, its application remains constrained due to teachers' low digital literacy and the lack of supporting facilities. Therefore, it is an essential need for teachers to be technologically proficient, particularly as the development of madrasah is increasingly directed towards integrating artificial intelligence and immersive learning technologies. Thus, the success of KBC implementation in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is not only determined by the curricular reform but also the readiness of human resources especially teachers who are the main agents of classroom implementation. Teachers should not only understand compassion as a core principle of education, but also operationalize that understanding through the use of humanistic, reflective and technologically flexible teaching strategies. Hence, sustained support is needed, including pedagogical training, improved digital literacy, provision of adequate learning resources and madrasah-level policies that promote an inclusive, compassion-centered learning culture. If these challenges are overcome successfully, KBC has the potential to be an educational model that forms excellent students, but also students with empathy, tolerance and noble character.

Another major obstacle to KBC implementation is the lack of facilities. identified that poor organization of administration, lack of teacher understanding and insufficient infrastructure are serious problems at the MI level. The findings underscore the need for increased investment in

facilities and infrastructure to support KBC implementation, including the provision of teacher guidebooks, KBC-based teaching modules, and technological resources to support digital learning.

In addition to technical and resource constraints, cultural issues are also faced in the implementation of KBC. The Minister of Religious Affairs has observed that changing the dominant educational paradigm from an authoritative, dominance paradigm to a more nurturing, care paradigm takes a long time and adaptation. Some other critics argue that the concept of 'love' in the curriculum is too abstract and hard to operationalise or measure, something that is reflected in the ongoing public debate about the implementation of the curriculum.

Similarly, a conceptual analysis identifies underlying tensions within the KBC framework, most notably the paradox between efforts to standardize the value of "love" within a formal curriculum and its inherently subjective, personal nature. Other practical challenges include teacher readiness and sociocultural resistance. The study concludes that the success of KBC ultimately depends on how these tensions are handled – through context-sensitive adaptation, strong teacher training and further empirical research.

5. Conclusions

The Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) is a transformative policy initiative introduced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and was officially launched in July 2025. The curriculum is built on five basic values namely Panca Cinta, namely love of God, love of knowledge, love of self and others, love of the environment, and love of the homeland based on the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs (KMA) Number 1503 of 2024 and the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education Number 6077 of 2025. Implementation of KBC at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level is based on pedagogical approaches such as immersive learning, blended learning, and meaningful learning, with a special focus on the role of teachers as role models and the infusion of love-based values across all subjects. The results of previous studies indicate that the implementation of KBC always has a positive impact, such as strengthening students' characters, reducing intolerance, increasing empathy, increasing the ability to learn independently, and creating a more inclusive and harmonious madrasah environment. However, there are still significant challenges to overcome such as teacher preparedness in terms of pedagogical practice and digital literacy, lack of infrastructure and resistance to shifting from traditional, cognitively-oriented learning paradigms. The success of the KBC implementation lies in the interplay of three interdependent pillars: teachers as role models, a humanistic administrative and supervisory system, and the integration of child-friendly and sustainable digital technology.

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