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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOVE-BASED CURRICULUM (KBC) IN STRENGTHENING STUDENTS' CHARACTER AT MADRASAHS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana praktik-praktik yang terkait dengan Kurikulum Berbasis Kasih (KBC) diterapkan untuk mendukung pengembangan karakter siswa di madrasah. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi lapangan kualitatif multi-lokasi di tiga lokasi utama, yaitu MIN 1 Medan, MTsN 1 Banda Aceh, dan MAN 2 Bireuen, dengan mengacu pada wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi kelembagaan dari 15 tenaga pendidik (lima di setiap lokasi: kepala sekolah, wakil kepala sekolah bidang kurikulum, dan tiga guru). Sebagai bukti deskriptif tambahan, satu tanggapan Google Forms diperoleh dari masing-masing dua lembaga tambahan: MAS Daarul Ikhlaash, Kutai Timur, dan MTsS Mangku Alam. Kuesioner tersebut terdiri dari 11 pernyataan mengenai praktik spiritual, disiplin persuasif, kepedulian dan kerja sama, keterlibatan belajar, suasana belajar yang aman, pengajaran yang penuh kasih sayang, toleransi, kepedulian terhadap lingkungan, identitas nasional, serta hasil karakter yang dirasakan. Tanggapan di kedua lembaga tersebut berupa 'Setuju' atau 'Sangat Setuju'; skor rata-rata deskriptifnya adalah 4,45/5 untuk MAS Daarul Ikhlaash dan 4,18/5 untuk MTsS Mangku Alam. Hasil dari responden tunggal ini mewakili persepsi dan bukan bukti perubahan perilaku yang terukur atau efektivitas kausal. Studi kasus lapangan menggambarkan praktik-praktik terkait KBC seperti menyambut siswa, dialog reflektif, hubungan guru-siswa yang penuh kepedulian, dan respons restoratif terhadap konflik, sekaligus mengidentifikasi tantangan implementasi, termasuk pemahaman dan kapasitas guru yang tidak merata. Temuan-temuan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa praktik-praktik semacam itu mungkin dapat mendukung terciptanya lingkungan madrasah yang lebih penuh kepedulian dan berorientasi pada pembentukan karakter. Interpretasi ini dibatasi oleh jumlah informan yang sedikit, kurangnya

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perspektif langsung dari siswa dan orang tua, serta hanya adanya satu responden kuesioner di setiap lokasi tambahan.

Keywords:
Love-Based Curriculum; Character Building; Madrasah; Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study explores how practices associated with the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) are implemented to support students' character development in madrasahs. The study uses a qualitative multi-site field-study design at three core sites MIN 1 Medan, MTsN 1 Banda Aceh, and MAN 2 Bireuen drawing on interviews, observations, and institutional documentation from 15 school personnel (five at each site: the principal, vice principal for curriculum, and three teachers). As supplementary descriptive evidence, one Google Forms response was obtained from each of two additional institutions: MAS Daarul Ikhlaash, Kutai Timur, and MTsS Mangku Alam. The questionnaire comprised 11 statements about spiritual practice, persuasive discipline, care and cooperation, learning engagement, a safe learning atmosphere, compassionate teaching, tolerance, environmental care, national identity, and perceived character outcomes. Responses at both institutions were either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree'; the descriptive mean scores were 4.45/5 for MAS Daarul Ikhlaash and 4.18/5 for MTsS Mangku Alam. These single-respondent results represent perceptions and are not evidence of measured behavioral change or causal effectiveness. The field-based cases describe KBC-related practices such as welcoming students, reflective dialogue, caring teacher–student relationships, and restorative responses to conflict, while also identifying implementation challenges, including uneven teacher understanding and capacity. The findings suggest that such practices may support a more caring and character-oriented madrasah environment. Interpretation is limited by the small number of informants, the lack of direct student and parent perspectives, and the single questionnaire respondent at each supplementary site.

A. INTRODUCTION

The massive and rapid advancements in science and technology have brought about very tangible changes in various sectors of life. The field of education is no exception; the education system has undergone many changes and shifts in order to address the challenges posed by the development of information technology. This can be seen in Indonesia's education system, which has revised its curriculum numerous times. Currently, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is launching a love-based curriculum (KBC) for madrasahs. As the lifeblood of education, the curriculum must be able to address global challenges and produce high-quality human resources who possess good moral character and are relevant to the changing times (Hidayat, 2025; Tambunan et al., 2025). However, a high-quality educational curriculum that is relevant to the times does not automatically guarantee educational progress. A comprehensive and innovative curriculum must also be supported by proper implementation within the school environment (Kasuga et al., 2025).

Advances in information technology have broken down the barriers of distance and time, leading to a surge in the consumption of disinformation that has had devastating consequences for the younger generation. The freedom to access a wide variety of entertainment and news has eroded the values of character, ethics, and empathy that should have been instilled from a young age (Nugroho & Istiqomah, 2025). Today, we see and hear distressing news regarding the behavior of many young people, such as bullying, cheating, gang fights, physical altercations, drug use, promiscuity, and other issues (Sunawan et al., 2023; Suwarno, 2023). This certainly poses a unique challenge for education advocates to establish educational institutions as a bulwark to protect students from the harmful behaviors mentioned above (Mohammed et al., 2024). It is not just educational institutions. The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture, plays a crucial role in implementing educational policies that are relevant to on the ground conditions and in taking the strengthening of students' character seriously through policy formulation, particularly in designing the educational curriculum.

Strengthening students' character is crucial during early childhood, whether for students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Tsanawiyah, or Aliyah levels. This is supported by al-Abrasyi's statement that character education must be instilled from an early age or even earlier, beginning with family upbringing (Al-Abrasyi, 1975; Yus & Walidin, 2025). Furthermore, al-Abrasyi emphasizes that character education is the primary foundation for Muslim society to become leaders in this world who are responsible, compassionate, moral, and, of course, possess high integrity. This aligns with the principles of a love-based curriculum that emphasizes the development of students' character.



Figure 1 Principles of Implementing a Love-Based Curriculum

The chart above explicitly identifies character development as a key component of the principles guiding the implementation of the love-based curriculum. This underscores the urgency of implementing character-building initiatives as an integral part of the comprehensive implementation of the love-based curriculum (KBC) to foster students who are outstanding, virtuous, of good character, faithful, empathetic, and honest. Although the love-based curriculum (KBC) has established student character development as a core principle, the reality on the ground has not yet aligned with the content of the love-based curriculum (KBC). Therefore, there are clearly issues with the implementation of the love-based curriculum (KBC) in madrasahs across Indonesia.

The problems with the education system in Indonesia are not only rooted in an educational curriculum that fails to support or is irrelevant to real-world needs. Rather, the implementation of the curriculum often does not follow the steps outlined in the curriculum document, resulting in it being neglected and carried out merely as a formality or for the sake of a report on paper (Waruwu & Setiawati, 2025). When a curriculum is not implemented as intended, it is certain that the intended goals and outcomes will not be achieved. Ideally, an educational curriculum that has been designed and structured effectively should also be implemented proportionally and actively to achieve satisfactory goals and outcomes (Syafei, 2025). The most important aspect in achieving an optimal education system lies not only in a high-quality curriculum but also in the implementation process, which must be carried out in accordance with the curriculum's provisions. As shown in the diagram below;



Figure 2 Stages of Implementing a Love-Based Curriculum

The diagram above clearly illustrates the steps that must be taken to achieve the implementation of an optimal and comprehensive educational curriculum. Character development for students will not be realized if it is merely outlined in the curriculum system. Therefore, educators must have a thorough understanding of the curriculum, access to adequate facilities and infrastructure, and, of course, the implementation of a character-based curriculum within the school environment (Nurhayati et al., 2022). In other words, this applies not only during the learning process but also outside of it while students are on school grounds. It is crucial to incorporate student character development into the love-based curriculum (KBC) as a first step toward shaping individuals who possess strong character, ethics, empathy, tolerance, and the ability to think critically in today's world.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, through the educational institutions (madrasahs) under its auspices, seeks to nurture individuals who prioritize the values of tolerance and noble character in the face of various waves of disinformation through a love-based curriculum (KBC). The love-based curriculum is designed to foster a more holistic education focused on the values of love, empathy, tolerance, compassion, integrity, and kindness (Kemenag, 2025). The main focus of the love-based curriculum lies in faith, knowledge, spiritual understanding, worship, and practice. One of the

principles of the love-based curriculum (KBC) is character development, which focuses on developing students' character by strengthening their empathy, tolerance, and respect (Kemenag, 2025).

The Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) prioritizes deep learning, which has three main pillars: mindful learning, meaningful learning, and joyful learning (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). In addition, the deep learning approach also incorporates elective courses in coding and AI (artificial intelligence), which are highly relevant given the current dynamics of globalization. The deep learning approach also emphasizes that the knowledge and skills students acquire should not be limited to grades on paper but should also be applied in their daily lives within the community (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). The integration of the love-based curriculum (KBC) in madrasahs is carried out to foster individuals with ethics, character, faith, and respect, prioritizing the development of students' character alongside the development of soft skills and hard skills (Kemenag, 2025; Kemendikdasmen, 2025).

This research is crucial to fostering madrasah students who possess strong character, honesty, integrity, good moral values, and global competitiveness through the implementation of a love-based curriculum (KBC). The results of this study can serve as a concrete step toward realizing Indonesia's Golden Age in 2045, as the primary tangible manifestation of the implementation of the love-based curriculum (KBC). Furthermore, this study seeks to uncover the challenges faced by teachers and education practitioners in implementing the love-based curriculum (KBC) to strengthen the character of students in madrasahs.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach. Qualitative research involves direct engagement with the phenomenon or activity under investigation and direct interaction with the research subjects without intermediaries. Qualitative research ensures that all data collected and reported align with reality and the facts on the ground (Creswell, 2017). The approach chosen for this study is a field study. A field study is research conducted by collecting data and information directly from the field or research site. The purpose of a field study is to understand a phenomenon or problem occurring in the field in a more in-depth and contextual manner (Gravett, 2025).

The choice of a field study design in this research was based on the need to capture the pedagogical essence of the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC), which is organic in nature and rich in affective values. Through direct engagement at the research site, the researcher sought to deconstruct the reality of curriculum implementation which is often trapped in administrative formalities in order to uncover patterns of genuine interaction between educators and students in the character-building process. Thus, this approach enables the researcher to present a comprehensive narrative of how the values of empathy and compassion are transformed into a vibrant and functional learning ecosystem within the madrasah environment.

This study adopts a qualitative multi-site field-study design to examine KBC-related practices in three core madrasah sites: MIN 1 Medan, MTsN 1 Banda Aceh, and MAN 2 Bireuen. The core fieldwork used interviews, observations, and institutional documentation. The 15 informants comprised five school personnel at each core site: the madrasah principal, the vice principal for curriculum, and three teachers. The manuscript's fieldwork phase began in early March 2026, with visits conducted from

late May through late July 2026. The selection of these sites provides a comparison across madrasah levels and local contexts; the findings are context specific rather than nationally representative.

To supplement the core qualitative material, the authors also included two Google Forms questionnaire responses recorded on October 5, 2026, and October 25, 2026, from MAS Daarul Ikhlaash, Kutai Timur, and MTsS Mangku Alam, respectively. Each institution is represented by one response. The form contains 11 Likert-type statements covering students' worship, discipline, care and cooperation, learning engagement, learning safety and enjoyment, compassionate teaching, tolerance and bullying, environmental responsibility, love of country and religious moderation, and perceived character outcomes. For descriptive presentation only, 'Strongly Agree' was coded as 5 and 'Agree' as 4; no inferential statistics were conducted. These responses are treated as institutional perceptions and supplementary data, not as equivalent to interviews or direct observations at the two additional sites.

The qualitative materials are organized through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with interview, observation, and documentary sources considered in relation to one another. The questionnaire responses are summarized descriptively. The available materials do not document the interview duration, transcription protocol, formal coding scheme, member checking, or ethics approval details; these procedural particulars should be supplied by the research team if they were undertaken. The absence of direct student and parent participation and the small supplementary survey size are acknowledged as limitations.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strengthening Students' Character in a Love-Based Curriculum

Character education in madrasahs in Indonesia has historically been associated with the enforcement of rigid and formalistic discipline. However, with the development of modern pedagogical theories, a paradigm shift has emerged toward a construct known as the "Love-Based Curriculum" (Al-Hubb) (Laili, 2026). This curriculum does not negate rules; rather, it shifts the driving force from fear of punishment to an intrinsic awareness born of a sense of being loved and valued (Wapa, 2025). Theologically, this idea is deeply rooted in the values of prophetic Islam. The Qur'an explicitly emphasizes that the primary mission of the prophetic message is to spread compassion to all of creation (Rahmatan lil 'Alamin). When a madrasah adopts this principle, every element of the learning process—from the institution's vision to daily classroom interactions must reflect this radiance of compassion (Fatikhasari et al., 2025).

This deeply affective approach requires educators to create learning spaces that ensure psychological safety for students (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). In a psychologically safe environment free from intimidation, students' emotional and spiritual intelligence can develop optimally. Love, in this context, functions as a measurable pedagogical method, not merely a burst of aimless sentimental emotion. Furthermore, this love-based curriculum reconstruction draws on the Qur'anic concept of gentle communication (qawlan layyinan). Teachers in madrasahs no longer position themselves merely as enforcers of school rules, but rather as empathetic murabbi (mentors) (Parhan, 2025). This transformation is crucial for fostering authentic piety, in

which students choose to exhibit noble character because they understand the beauty of these moral values (Iqbal et al., 2026).

At the institutional level, a love-based curriculum promotes the reconstruction of the madrasah's environment into a more humanistic one (Kemenag, 2025). The relationship between teachers and students is transformed from a rigid, subordinate dynamic into a theological partnership in the pursuit of knowledge. When students feel that their very existence is valued and their potential is cherished, their resistance to the internalization of character values will decrease significantly.

Character building through a love-based curriculum holistically targets three main dimensions of a student's identity. The first dimension is the spiritual dimension (vertical spirituality), in which students are guided to cultivate sincere love for Allah SWT and His Messenger. This love sparks an awareness to perform acts of worship voluntarily, not because of curricular pressure or the threat of academic consequences (Abdullah, 2025).

The second dimension focuses on the social aspect (socio-horizontal), which manifests as social righteousness (al-shalah al-ijtima'i). Students are taught to translate the love they receive at the madrasah into concrete actions of caring for others, advocating for justice, and respecting human rights. An inclusive urban character is fostered to prepare them to face the reality of Indonesia's highly pluralistic society (Alya et al., 2025).

The third dimension is the ecological dimension, which views the environment as an entity that must be loved and protected as part of humanity's duty as stewards of the earth. Under the theological framework of "Qur'anic Ecology," madrasah students are educated to develop sensitivity toward the preservation of the natural environment (Mangunjaya, 2014). The integration of these three dimensions ensures that a love-based curriculum does not foster selfish piety, but rather piety that has a broad impact.

Implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum to Strengthen Student Character in Madrasahs in Indonesia

1. MIN 1 Kota Medan

The implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at MIN 1 Medan City is designed to align with the psychological characteristics of elementary school-aged children who are in the concrete operational stage. Children at this age require concrete visualizations of abstract values through direct examples set by those around them. Therefore, this madrasah located in the midst of the dynamic heterogeneity of Medan City utilizes teachers' exemplary behavior as the primary instrument for instilling the value of love and compassion.

As an urban madrasah serving students from diverse ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic levels, MIN 1 Kota Medan faces significant challenges related to diversity. A love-based approach is integrated as a social glue capable of uniting differences and creating a sense of justice for every child. Every student, regardless of their family background, receives the same emotional support from the educators at this madrasah.

An early manifestation of this affective curriculum can be seen in the tradition of welcoming students at the madrasah gate every morning before the bell rings. The madrasah principal and the teachers on duty stand there warmly to greet, shake hands with, and offer sincere smiles to every child who arrives. This simple gesture has a

profound psychological impact in building the children's mental readiness to begin their learning activities with a cheerful mood.

Through warm eye contact and greetings that address each child by name, the teachers at MIN 1 Kota Medan are conveying the message that the madrasah is a safe place. The physical presence of teachers welcoming the children in the morning helps alleviate the academic and social anxieties often experienced by elementary-aged children. This sense of security serves as the primary foundation for the development of self-confidence and high motivation to learn among the students. Based on interviews with the principal, the vice principal for curriculum, and the teachers, it was found that;

> "At MIN 1 Medan, we always strive to instill a sense of love and security in our students while they are on the school grounds. We do this by welcoming our students at the school gate every morning as an expression of love and care."

In the classroom, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum is reflected in classroom management that focuses on respecting each individual's uniqueness. Teachers avoid using negative words, derogatory labels, or a harsh tone of voice when interacting with students. Positive communication is fostered to preserve the children's self-esteem and to teach them to use polite language when interacting with their peers.

When disciplinary violations or conflicts among students occur in the classroom, teachers at MIN 1 in Medan do not immediately resort to physical punishment or sanctions that humiliate the children. The problem-solving process is carried out through a personal approach, in which teachers engage the children in one-on-one dialogue to understand the background of their behavior. This restorative approach aims to make the child aware of their mistake while repairing the relationship without causing psychological trauma.

The teaching of both general and religious subjects is contextually integrated with values of affection to strengthen students' moral understanding. Teachers are creative in designing learning scenarios that involve group collaboration, mutual assistance, and appreciating classmates' strengths. Through these engaging active learning methods, students learn firsthand how to practice tolerance and empathy in real life.

In-depth observations of the classroom atmosphere at MIN 1 in Medan revealed a high level of enthusiasm among students throughout the teaching and learning process. The absence of psychological pressure encouraged the children to ask questions, express their opinions, and explore without fear of making mistakes. Teachers viewed mistakes as a natural part of the learning process that should be valued, allowing the children's creativity to flourish without limits.

This love-based character building at the elementary level is also supported by the design of affective-oriented instructional documents known as Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP). In these documents, success is measured not only by the achievement of cognitive competency standards but also by the development of students' social behavior. The school has also developed a character assessment guide that is periodically completed by classroom teachers based on daily behavioral observations.

The success of this program requires synergistic cooperation between the madrasah and parents at home to ensure continuity in instilling values. MIN 1 Kota Medan facilitates this communication by providing a character liaison book that serves as a medium for joint monitoring. This synergy ensures that the good habits formed at the madrasah can continue to be maintained and practiced by the children within the family environment.

A tangible manifestation of the success of this affective curriculum is evident in the high level of social awareness demonstrated by students on various occasions. When a classmate experiences a misfortune or falls ill, students take the initiative to collect donations or create cards with messages of prayer. This prosocial behavior proves that the consistent cultivation of empathy through love has become an integral part of the children's personalities.

Religious activities such as congregational Dhuha prayer and memorizing short chapters of the Qur'an are also presented in a fun and motivating atmosphere. Teachers offer sincere appreciation for every effort the children make, no matter how small their progress may be. This appreciative approach fosters a love for worship in children, so that they engage in it out of spiritual awareness, not because of coercion.

Theoretically, the emotional investment provided by educators at the elementary school level is the most crucial foundation for a child's future. A person's fundamental character is shaped during this golden period, when memories of how they were treated will leave a lasting impression throughout their lives. Therefore, MIN 1 Kota Medan is committed to maintaining a consistent environment at the madrasah as a second home filled with the warmth of love.

The challenge ahead is how to uphold the idealism of this Love-Based Curriculum amid the often rigid demands of national academic standardization. The madrasah principal continues to encourage teachers not to get caught up in merely meeting administrative targets at the expense of the quality of their emotional bonds with students. Striking a balance between academic achievement and character development remains the primary focus of all policies implemented.

The conclusion drawn from the experience at MIN 1 Kota Medan shows that love is not a weakness in educational management, but rather an extraordinary transformative force. Through purposeful kindness, the madrasah is able to channel children's misbehavior and transform it into positive energy for learning and creativity. This model is worthy of serving as a reference for the development of other elementary madrasahs in Indonesia that aspire to provide an education that treats children as human beings.

2. MTsN 1 Kota Banda Aceh

Turning to the junior high school level at MTsN 1 in Banda Aceh, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum faces challenges related to the psychological development of early adolescents. Students at this age undergo significant hormonal and physical changes, which often lead to emotional instability and the turmoil of self-identity exploration (Muktar, 2025). The love-based approach at this madrasah is designed to serve as an emotional anchor that channels these adolescent struggles toward productive and positive outcomes.

The social environment of Banda Aceh, which upholds the values of Islamic Sharia, lends a unique character to the formulation of the affective curriculum at MTsN

1 Banda Aceh. Compassion is not understood in an unrestricted, limitless sense, but rather is framed within the values of Islamic modesty and respect for religious norms. This madrasah has successfully demonstrated that the strict enforcement of religious rules can be carried out in ways that are persuasive, educational, and full of compassion.

One of the main pillars of implementing the affective curriculum at this school is optimizing the role of Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers, who are positioned as friends to the students. The old paradigm, which portrayed the counseling office as a place to judge troubled students, has been completely transformed into a comfortable and confidential space for consultation. Students are encouraged to feel confident sharing various personal, academic, or friendship-related issues without fear of judgment or social sanctions.

Subject teachers at MTsN 1 Banda Aceh are also trained in active listening skills when interacting with students. Early adolescents have a strong need for recognition and validation of their developing emotions. When teachers are willing to take the time to listen attentively to their concerns, a strong bond of trust is formed, which facilitates the process of internalizing character values. According to an interview with the principal of MTsN 1 Banda Aceh City:

> "The presence of guidance and counseling teachers is a crucial aspect in creating a holistic, healthy, and character-building educational institution. Having an ideal number of guidance and counseling teachers in every madrasah will greatly support the implementation of the "Panca Cinta" (Five Loves) curriculum, which is based on love. Unfortunately, we still lack guidance and counseling teachers; therefore, we need to train all teachers in the basic principles of counseling."

In terms of the curriculum, character building at MTsN 1 Banda Aceh is carried out through the integration of spiritual literacy into the daily learning process. Islamic religious education is focused on the theological aspect of Allah SWT's compassion, so that students carry out religious obligations based on a sense of love and gratitude toward the Creator. This approach is considered more effective for fostering authentic religious awareness in adolescents compared to approaches that constantly emphasize threats and punishments.

This madrasah also designs periodic self-reflection and self-assessment programs attended by the entire academic community. During these solemn sessions, students are encouraged to reflect on their life goals, their responsibilities as students, and the sacrifices their parents have made for them. The profound emotional impact of these self-reflection activities often taps into students' deepest moral consciousness and spurs significant behavioral change.

Observations of social dynamics at MTsN 1 in Banda Aceh reveal a minimal incidence of verbal or physical bullying among students. This is because the school culture consistently promotes the values of mutual love and respect for differences as manifestations of faith. Upperclassmen are encouraged to look out for their younger peers, while younger students are taught to respect their seniors within the framework of Islamic brotherhood.

The madrasah also makes wise use of digital media to spread messages of character based on compassion. Through the creation of educational content on the

madrasah's official social media accounts, students are actively engaged to become agents of goodness in the online world. This initiative is an adaptive curriculum strategy designed to counterbalance the negative impact of digital content and channel adolescents' creativity toward beneficial endeavors.

Documentarily, the administration of MTsN 1 Banda Aceh has a comprehensive instrument for tracking students' moral development. The student record book documents not only infractions but, more importantly, records acts of kindness and commendable behavior demonstrated by students. Awarding points to students who perform commendable acts is one innovation designed to stimulate the growth of positive character traits.

The positive impact of implementing this curriculum is widely recognized by the community and the parents who entrust their children's education to this institution. Graduates of MTsN 1 Banda Aceh are known for their excellent language skills, strong commitment to religious practice, and well-developed social adaptability. The students' academic achievements remain outstanding, proving that an affective approach does not hinder cognitive achievement.

This success is inseparable from the commitment of the madrasah principal, who consistently provides family-oriented clinical supervision of the teachers' performance. Teachers experiencing burnout or difficulties in dealing with students are given psychological counseling and humanistic work motivation. The supportive and caring work environment among fellow teachers ultimately translates into the quality of service provided to students.

Facing an era of increasingly intense information disruption, MTsN 1 Banda Aceh continues to innovate in its methods of conveying moral messages to remain relevant to the tastes of the younger generation. The "Love-Based Curriculum" approach has proven capable of serving as a strong moral bulwark for early adolescents against negative influences from the outside environment. A strong sense of belonging to the madrasah makes students proud to uphold the institution's good name through commendable behavior.

Deep reflection on this second case study offers a valuable lesson: educating adolescents cannot be achieved through repressive and rigid methods. An approach that prioritizes dialogue, empathy, and sincerity has proven more effective in taming the turbulent egos of adolescents. MTsN 1 Banda Aceh has demonstrated how the values of Islamic Sharia can be beautifully grounded through a consistent touch of educational compassion.

In the future, the sustainability of this program must be maintained by periodically strengthening educators' pedagogical and affective competencies. Teachers must continually update their understanding of contemporary adolescent psychology so they can provide appropriate affective responses in line with the times. In this way, the Love-Based Curriculum will remain a relevant and contextual tool for guiding the future of the young Muslim generation in Aceh.

3. MAN 2 Bireuen

At the upper secondary level at MAN 2 Bireuen, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum has entered a more mature phase namely, the phase of empowerment, autonomy, and social responsibility. Madrasah aliyah students are in the late stages of adolescence, approaching early adulthood, a time when the need for

recognition of their own capabilities and independence becomes particularly prominent (Atsari & Ichsan, 2025). The madrasah translates the concept of love into the form of placing full trust in students to realize their leadership potential.

MAN 2 Bireuen is situated within the geographical and cultural context of Bireuen Regency, known as one of Aceh's "santri cities" with a very strong religious tradition. The Love-Based Curriculum at this madrasah is integrated with the madrasah's values of independence and a spirit of service to the wider community. Teachers' love is no longer expressed through strict supervision but rather through enlightening and dialogic guidance, much like a mentor guiding a younger colleague.

One of the operational manifestations of the affective curriculum at MAN 2 Bireuen is the active involvement of students in managing student organizations such as OSIM, the Scouts, and mosque youth groups. Advisor teachers give the organization's leadership the freedom to design, budget, and execute various independent work programs. The trust placed in students by the madrasah is the highest expression of educational love, as it fosters a strong sense of responsibility in students.

The guidance provided by teachers when students face obstacles in carrying out organizational programs always prioritizes the principle of constructive evaluation. Teachers do not blame failures in a destructive manner but instead invite students to sit down together to critically analyze weaknesses and formulate solutions for improvement. This egalitarian and respectful relationship fosters students' emotional maturity and mental resilience in facing life's pressures.

In the academic realm, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum at MAN 2 Bireuen is realized through the application of a collaborative learning model grounded in action research and social awareness. Students are encouraged to step outside the classroom walls to witness firsthand the socioeconomic realities of the communities surrounding the madrasah (*MAN 2 Bireuen Gelar Kegiatan RAMAH (Ramadhan Meraih Berkah) Bersama KSPS*, 2025). They are challenged to identify real problems faced by community members and formulate alternative solutions based on the academic perspectives they have learned.

Through structured community service programs such as village da'wah literacy initiatives and independent social service projects the students' sense of compassion, which was initially individualistic, is transformed into tangible social concern. Students learn to empathize with the hardships of others and are motivated to make meaningful contributions toward improving their local environment. These hands-on field experiences provide moral lessons that leave a far deeper impression than mere classroom theory.

Observations conducted at MAN 2 Bireuen reveal a healthy and democratic culture of scholarly discussion among teachers and students. In religious study forums and youth seminars, students are given ample opportunity to openly express their critical thoughts and arguments. Teachers respect all differing scholarly opinions and guide students to express them with a high standard of academic courtesy.

The close emotional bond between teachers and students at this high school level fosters an academic climate conducive to innovative achievements. Students feel fully supported by the madrasah in exploring their interests and talents across various fields, including science, religion, and sports. The teachers' love, expressed through moral and material support, serves as the primary fuel that empowers students to compete at the national level.

The success of affection-based management at MAN 2 Bireuen is supported by systematically organized portfolios of student activities as part of authentic assessment. The syllabus and lesson plans at this madrasah include character-building indicators that are measured through concrete acts of social compassion. The madrasah also documents the track records of its alumni to assess the long-term effectiveness of instilling these love-based values.

The impact of this comprehensive affective curriculum integration is reflected in the quality of MAN 2 Bireuen's graduates, who demonstrate a balance between intellectual intelligence and moral sensitivity. Alumni of this madrasah are known for their strong moral integrity, leadership qualities, and deep commitment to serving the greater good of the community. This character foundation, rooted in love and compassion, serves as a valuable asset as they navigate the challenges of college life.

The principal of the madrasah emphasized that the greatest challenge at the aliyah level is preparing students mentally so they are not easily swayed by the onslaught of materialistic and individualistic values in the outside world. The Love-Based Curriculum is designed to provide strong moral resilience by instilling the awareness that true happiness lies in the ability to love and benefit fellow creatures of Allah SWT.

Theoretically, the success of the educational model at MAN 2 Bireuen reinforces the view that an affective approach is highly relevant for shaping the character of future leaders. Love, manifested in the form of trust and empowerment, has proven capable of unleashing the best potential in late-adolescent students. This model dispels the notion that discipline at the high school level can only be enforced through a rigid, militaristic approach.

An analytical comparison of the three madrasahs (MIN 1 Medan, MTsN 1 Banda Aceh, and MAN 2 Bireuen) leads to the overall conclusion that the Love-Based Curriculum is a highly adaptive character-building model. Its implementation undergoes a beautiful evolution in tandem with the students' age from warm nurturing at the elementary level, to a friendly, dialogic space at the lower secondary level, to full empowerment at the upper secondary level. Love consistently serves as the common thread that binds the entire process of the students' spiritual transformation at the madrasahs.

The integration of this affective curriculum has also proven its ability to synergize the achievement of national academic standards with the cultivation of noble Islamic morality. Madrasahs are no longer merely factories churning out high graduation rates; rather, they have transformed into nurseries for noble character, deeply rooted in the values of divinity and humanity. It is hoped that the success of these three madrasahs will inspire the direction of madrasah curriculum reform policies in Indonesia on a macro level.

A strategic step forward for Islamic education policymakers in Indonesia is to formulate formal guidelines for implementing the Love-Based Curriculum so that it can be adopted more widely. Standardization of training in affective competencies for teachers is needed so that they possess the mental readiness and psychological skills necessary to implement this curriculum. Strengthening research and evaluation regarding the impact of the affective curriculum must also be continuously enhanced to maintain the scientific accountability of this educational model.

Finally, the educational journey at MIN 1 Medan, MTsN 1 Banda Aceh, and MAN 2 Bireuen has provided tangible evidence that when education is managed with the

heart, it can touch the hearts of students. Noble character, shaped through the touch of love and compassion, will crystallize into a resilient personality that is not easily eroded by the changing times. Indonesia's golden generation one with strong character and noble hearts is certain to emerge from the womb of madrasahs managed with love and compassion.

The key to the sustainability of this visionary curriculum lies in the sincerity and consistency of educators in keeping the flame of compassion alive in their classrooms. Teachers are the living curriculum, and their genuine example is the best textbook that students will read and emulate throughout their lives. The investment in love instilled today is a guarantee of quality for the emergence of a just, prosperous, and dignified national civilization in the future.

The challenges of the times may change and technology may continue to evolve, but the essence of a child's humanity will always require a touch of love to grow to its full potential. Through the Love-Based Curriculum, madrasahs in Indonesia have taken the right path in nurturing young people to become fully human, in order to usher in a brilliant future for the Muslim community and the nation. This collective awareness must continue to be nurtured and disseminated so that the positive energy of this affective education can be felt by all the nation's children, without exception.

In conclusion, this theoretical analysis and empirical comparison affirm that character-building based on love is no longer an alternative option, but rather a strategic necessity amid the spiritual barrenness of modernity. The successful implementation in Medan, Banda Aceh, and Bireuen serves as solid evidence that the effectiveness of Islamic education lies in its ability to ground the value of rahmatan lil 'alamin through a methodology of love that is both universal and contextual.

Factors Supporting and Hindering the Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) in Strengthening Student Character at Madrasahs in Indonesia

A. Supporting Factors

The successful implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) in madrasahs across Indonesia is driven by strong theological, cultural, and structural foundations. The first and most important supporting factor is the philosophical roots of traditional Islamic education, which are inherently tied to the value of compassion (rahmah) (Rafi et al., 2025). Since the era of the pesantren, the institutional framework of madrasahs has always positioned the kiai or teacher as a spiritual figure who nurtures with compassion, rather than merely as an instructor of academic texts (Masfufah & Husni, 2026). This cultural characteristic facilitates the adoption of KBC values because the madrasah ecosystem is already accustomed to a nurturing approach full of empathy.

The commitment of madrasah leadership to being transformative and visionary. Madrasah principals who possess a deep understanding of affective management tend to be able to formulate humanistic school policies (Ula et al., 2026). This type of leadership does not focus solely on quantitative administrative targets but actively fosters a work atmosphere characterized by openness, psychological comfort, and close collaboration among teachers.

Furthermore, educators possess high pedagogical competence and personal qualities, including well-developed emotional intelligence (EQ) and spiritual intelligence (SQ) (Abdul-jabbar, 2026). Teachers who integrate spiritual aspects into

their teaching will view students as a trust from God who must be guided with gentleness, in accordance with the principle of qawlan layyinan. When teachers radiate genuine love and compassion, students' psychological resistance to internalizing noble character traits will decrease drastically (Fauzi, 2025).

Furthermore, the availability of supporting facilities and a physical environment at the madrasah that is beautiful and child-friendly (a green and peaceful campus). Madrasahs that consistently develop green open spaces and integrated ecological programs provide calming psychological stimulation for students (Mangunjaya, 2014). A peaceful, clean environment free from any sense of barrenness indirectly reduces students' academic stress levels, thereby facilitating the cultivation of a love for the environment and for others.

Added to this is the strong support from the school committee and the active role of parents and guardians in aligning parenting at home with the madrasah curriculum. Successful character development requires continuity of values between the school and family environments. When parents actively support the madrasah's affective programs and do not practice conflicting parenting styles at home, children's character development will proceed in a linear and accelerated manner.

This is further supported by regulations and policy reinforcement from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, which are increasingly accommodating of curriculum innovations based on character development and religious moderation. National policies that encourage madrasahs to diversify their curricula in accordance with local wisdom provide a legal framework for the development of KBC (Yus et al., 2025). This legal framework provides madrasah administrators with the confidence to design comprehensive affective assessment instruments without fear of violating national curriculum guidelines.

In addition to the humanistic integration of information technology through character based digital literacy programs, technology used as a bridge to foster connections, recognize student work, and facilitate online counseling has proven capable of expanding the reach of KBC implementation beyond the confines of the physical classroom. Through digital media managed wisely and with compassion, the madrasah's moral messages can continuously reach students in their private spaces.

The development of a tradition of religious research and critical thinking within madrasahs that values the diversity of students' intellectual potential. Madrasahs designated as research madrasahs provide students with guided academic freedom to explore knowledge without coercive pressure (*Menag: Madrasah Riset Sangat Penting*, 2025). This appreciative scientific approach fosters students' passion for learning because they feel heard and valued for their opinions.

The active involvement of intra-madrasah organizations and student groups in enforcing peer-based, persuasive discipline. When values of compassion and mutual care are transmitted through peer-to-peer interactions, the results are far more organic than one way indoctrination by teachers. This model minimizes the potential for bullying because students identify with one another as part of a single, cohesive spiritual family.

Finally, through strategic partnerships between the madrasah and external institutions such as psychological organizations, social organizations, and local community leaders. These partnerships enrich the madrasah's affective approach by providing emotional competence training for teaching staff (Parhan, 2025).

Furthermore, the involvement of the local community in the madrasah's social activities provides a real-world laboratory for students to empirically practice the character trait of social love.

B. Inhibitory Factor

Although supported by various external and internal factors, the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum (KBC) in Indonesia still frequently encounters complex structural and cultural barriers (Akib et al., 2025). The first and most fundamental barrier is the dominance of a national educational paradigm that is cognitively oriented and trapped in the standardization of quantitative test scores. The pressure to meet academic graduation targets and massive administrative demands often force teachers to neglect the process of providing emotional support in order to ensure mastery of the written curriculum content.

The next obstacle is a gap in understanding and ideological resistance from some educators who still glorify conventional methods based on coercion and corporal punishment. Some teachers believe that a compassionate and gentle approach will only produce a generation that is weak, spoiled, and undisciplined (Virgo et al., 2025). This inability to distinguish between professional firmness and psychological violence often leads to inconsistent implementation of KBC in the classroom.

In addition, there are limited budgets and disparities in financial allocations for madrasahs, particularly those in underdeveloped regions. The development of an ideal affective curriculum requires investment in teacher capacity building training, the provision of adequate counseling spaces, and the creation of a suitable green environment (Hady, 2024). When madrasahs are still struggling to meet basic operational needs and ensure teacher well-being, the agenda for affective curriculum innovation is often pushed to the back burner.

This is compounded by parents' limited understanding of the urgency of KBC, which is further exacerbated by the practice of authoritarian or neglectful parenting styles at home. When students receive loving guidance at madrasah but return home to face verbal abuse, family conflicts, or unrealistic academic expectations, they experience cognitive-moral dissonance (Shodiq, 2025). This clash of values undermines the effectiveness of the character-building efforts designed by the madrasah.

Compounded by the strong tide of cyber disruption and the pervasive influence of social media algorithms that deliver content promoting radicalism, polarization, and extreme individualism to students' devices. New religious authorities in the digital realm, who often present rigid, black-and-white, and hate filled religious narratives, have become the primary challengers to the values of compassion taught in madrasahs (Campbell, 2013). This fragmentation of online information risks distorting students' ethical reasoning outside of school hours.

Moreover, the ratio of guidance counselors to the total number of students in madrasahs is severely disproportionate (Saputra, 2022). A love-based curriculum demands a personalized approach and early detection of students' psychological issues. The shortage of professional counselors means that many cases of cyberbullying, smartphone addiction, or academic depression among students are not addressed in depth, thereby undermining the essence of a safe environment (psychological safety) as envisioned by the KBC.

Furthermore, educators face an excessively high administrative burden due to the demands of various national curriculum reporting systems. Teachers spend too much time in front of computers preparing administrative documents, filling out assessment forms, and handling certification, leaving them emotionally drained (Kamali et al., 2025). As a result, teachers no longer have quality time to simply have heart-to-heart conversations with students who need attention.

Furthermore, there is the issue of disparities in teacher quality and competence across regions in Indonesia, particularly between urban madrasahs and those in 3T areas (Underdeveloped, Frontier, and Outermost). Training on compassion-based pedagogy and child developmental psychology has not been distributed evenly (Wijayanti et al., 2024). Teachers in remote areas often still rely on traditional parenting intuitions that are gender-biased or influenced by local cultural biases, which are not fully aligned with the spirit of modern KBC.

Finally, the phenomenon of cyberbullying among students occurs outside the madrasah's direct supervision through anonymous instant messaging groups (Debora et al., 2024). Although madrasahs have designed a loving physical environment, toxic interactions in the online world that occur 24 hours a day can quickly damage students' mental health. The limitations of the madrasah's digital control tools make it difficult to mitigate these virtual challenges.

Analysis/Discussion

Research conducted at five different locations from March through early August 2026 revealed that the implementation of the love-based curriculum in Indonesian madrasahs is still in its early stages. Although some madrasahs have been implementing the love-based curriculum since it was first officially adopted as the madrasah curriculum by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, adequate training and outreach regarding its implementation are still needed for madrasah teachers to ensure the successful implementation of the love-based curriculum in madrasahs.

When discussing character building within the love-based curriculum, this is the very essence of the curriculum. This is evident in the five pillars of love within the curriculum, which consist of love for Allah and the Prophet, love for knowledge, love for the environment, love for oneself and others, and love for the homeland. These five pillars of love, as conceived in the curriculum, represent the core values of character itself. This is because, fundamentally, character or moral conduct is the primary foundation for realizing these five pillars of love.

Findings from interviews and observations at the three core madrasahs document KBC-related practices that are intended to support character development, including welcoming students, reflective dialogue, and caring teacher–student interactions. The available qualitative evidence describes practices and school-culture features; it does not establish statistically significant changes in students' character. The supplementary Google Forms responses from MAS Daarul Ikhlaash, Kutai Timur, and MTsS Mangku Alam also show positive respondent perceptions across the questionnaire items, but because each site is represented by one respondent, they should not be generalized to the wider school population. These data are consistent with a supportive orientation toward KBC, while the degree of actual behavioral change remains to be investigated through direct student perspectives and longitudinal or behavioral evidence.

The Google Forms data add descriptive perceptions from two additional institutions, but they should be interpreted separately from the three core field-study cases because each institution contributed only one respondent and the dataset does not include direct student responses. At MAS Daarul Ikhlaash, Kutai Timur, the respondent selected 'Strongly Agree' on five statements and 'Agree' on six statements. The responses indicate positive perceptions regarding love-based worship, care and cooperation, an engaging and safe learning atmosphere, national identity, and character-related outcomes. The mean across the 11 items was 4.45 out of 5. At MTsS Mangku Alam, the respondent selected 'Strongly Agree' on two statements and 'Agree' on nine statements, yielding a mean of 4.18 out of 5. The strongest response at this site concerned spiritual practice and students' respect/tolerance, while the remaining statements were rated 'Agree'. These ratings are descriptive perceptions only and cannot establish the prevalence of practices among all teachers or demonstrate changes in students' character.

The integration of the *Panca Cinta* values into the *madrasah* ecosystem is theoretically consistent with Hilda Taba's (1970) perspective on curriculum development based on the needs and sociocultural values of the community. According to Taba, an effective curriculum does not merely focus on the transmission of cognitive knowledge but must also be capable of shaping students' values and attitudes through systematic habituation within the learning environment. The practice of welcoming students at the school gate and daily reflections on kindness toward parents at MTsN 1 Banda Aceh represent tangible manifestations of the hidden curriculum that are consistently internalized. This phenomenon reinforces Noddings' (Noddings, 2012) findings in 'Caring Theory in Education', which emphasize that interpersonal relationships grounded in care and affection between educators and students serve as the primary foundation for successful character development, surpassing the effectiveness of formal academic instruction in the classroom.

Although positive impacts on students' character have been observed, the finding that the implementation of this curriculum is still in its early stages indicates gaps in the readiness of the pedagogical infrastructure. Theoretically, the success of a curriculum innovation depends heavily on the implementation stage, as described in Michael Fullan's curriculum development model. Fullan emphasizes that substantial curriculum change requires a deep understanding on the part of practitioners in the field, which can only be achieved through ongoing professional development (Fullan, 2016). This is supported by research (Zaironi & Acetylena, 2026), which found that the effectiveness of integrating character values in Islamic educational institutions is often hindered by teachers' lack of conceptual understanding and the limited availability of structured training modules. Therefore, adequate training and outreach are essential prerequisites to ensure that a love-based curriculum does not remain merely a normative concept but becomes a consistent pedagogical practice across all madrasahs.

Furthermore, the instillation of the five pillars of character (panca cinta) essentially reflects a holistic approach within the theory of social reconstruction in the curriculum. The curriculum is designed not only to transfer knowledge but also to reconstruct students' social behavior so that it aligns with the values of divinity, humanity, and nationalism. Previous research by (Harahap et al., 2025; Musolin & Sudarmaji, 2025) on character building in madrasahs indicates that the internalization of religious and national values based on love (love-based pedagogy) can enhance

students' moral resilience amid the tide of modernization. Thus, when teachers' efficacy is strengthened through appropriate training programs, a love-based curriculum has the potential to serve as a model for character education transformation that not only improves the learning environment in madrasahs but also makes a tangible contribution to the sustainable development of the younger generation's moral character.

CONCLUSION

The findings across the three core field-study sites MIN 1 Medan, MTsN 1 Banda Aceh, and MAN 2 Bireuen suggest that KBC-related practices may support the development of a more caring and character-oriented madrasah environment. The distinctive practices described in the cases include teacher role modeling and warm student reception at MIN 1 Medan, dialogue and guidance-oriented relationships at MTsN 1 Banda Aceh, and the practices documented at MAN 2 Bireuen. Supplementary questionnaire responses from MAS Daarul Ikhlaash, Kutai Timur, and MTsS Mangku Alam were positive overall, with descriptive means of 4.45 and 4.18 out of 5, respectively; however, each institution supplied only one response. These ratings reflect respondent perceptions and do not prove improved student behavior or causal effectiveness.

The findings also point to the importance of teacher role modeling, supportive madrasah culture, and coordination with families, alongside adequate teacher preparation. The study is limited by its small number of informants, the absence of direct student and parent perspectives in the core fieldwork, and the single-response questionnaire data from the two supplementary sites. Future research should include students and parents, document behavioral indicators over time, and provide more systematic evidence from observations and institutional records. Recommendations should focus on sustained teacher training, clear and compassionate discipline, and context-sensitive monitoring of KBC practices. Accordingly, the present evidence supports cautious conclusions about the potential contribution of KBC practices rather than claims of demonstrated effectiveness.

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