

Implementation of Love-Based Curriculum in the Formation of Islamic Character of Students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received: Nov 03, 2025 Revised: Nov 23, 2025 Accepted: Des 23, 2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>love-based curriculum Islamic character madrasah tsanawiyah Islamic education character formation</p>	<p>This study examines the implementation of a love-based curriculum in the formation of students' Islamic character at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. The phenomenon of moral degradation among adolescents is a serious concern in the world of Islamic education, so a humanistic and rooted in the values of compassion is needed. The purpose of this study is to analyze the implementation of a love-based curriculum, identify teachers' strategies in integrating the value of compassion into learning, and evaluate its impact on the formation of students' Islamic character. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design at MTs Negeri 1 Malang City. Data collection was carried out through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The research informants include the head of the madrasah, the deputy head of the curriculum, the subject teacher, and the student. Data analysis used the interactive model Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The results of the study show that the implementation of a love-based curriculum is carried out through three dimensions: love for Allah, love for others, and love for science. Implementation strategies include an exemplary approach, habituation, and positive reinforcement. The resulting impacts include improved commendable morals, social empathy, and student motivation for learning.</p>
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A. Introduction

The formation of students' Islamic character is one of the fundamental goals of Islamic education, which is becoming increasingly crucial in the era of globalization and digital disruption. Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2023 recorded an increase in juvenile delinquency cases by 12.4% compared to the previous year, including bullying, fights, and social media abuse among high school-age students. This phenomenon shows that the character education approach applied so far has not been fully effective in fostering a strong Islamic character in the younger generation. Madrasah Tsanawiyah, as a formal Islamic educational institution, has a great responsibility in overcoming this problem through curriculum innovation that is more humanist and rooted in Islamic values that are rahmatan lil 'alamin. Hussin et al.'s (2024) bibliometric study of 297 Scopus documents shows that character education and pedagogy remain the primary themes in research on Islamic schools globally, underscoring the urgency of this study.

A love-based curriculum is an educational approach that places compassion at the core of the entire learning process. This concept is rooted in the Islamic teachings of mahabbah (love) which is the core of human relationships with Allah SWT, fellow humans, and the universe. In the context of Islamic education, the concept of tarbiyah which is rooted in the words rabb and rubūbīyah refers to Allah as the caretaker who educates His creation with compassion (Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2024). Coulombe et al. (2020) in their study in *Theory and Research in Education* emphasized that positive education based on well-being requires an emotionally supportive learning environment. In line with that, Noddings (2015) in the theory of ethics of care states that the caring relationship between teachers and students is the main foundation for the success of moral education. The concept of rahmah in Islam has also been studied by Abdalla et al. (2024) in *Education Sciences* as a pedagogical principle that combines prophetic compassion with contemporary educational practices in Islamic schools.

Several previous studies have examined various aspects of character education in madrasas. Umar et al. (2024) examined the transformation of moderate character education in Islamic educational institutions and found that an integrative approach that combines traditional values with religious moderation is able to form a tolerant and inclusive character of students. Rachman et al. (2023) examined the development of students' religious character through moral learning in madrassas and found that examples and habituation are the most effective strategies. Ma'arif et al. (2024) reported that integrative teaching practices significantly contribute to changes in students' attitudes and behaviors, especially in fostering tolerance. Internationally, Supriyono et al. (2024) found that character education grounded in philosophical values in traditional pesantren plays an important role in shaping the personalities of students with strong moral character.

Sahri and Hali's (2023) research examined the formation of Sufism-based character in students in West Kalimantan madrassas and found a positive impact on spiritual discipline. Wicaksono et al. (2024) show that the implementation of a pesantren based curriculum is able to increase the emotional intelligence of students. Meanwhile, Taufik (2020) emphasized the strategic role of Islamic religious education in strengthening character education in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0. However, these studies have not explored specifically how compassion (mahabbah) can be used as an integrative curricular basis in tsanawiyah madrasas. Malisi et al. (2022) have also studied the implementation of character education in madrasas and integrated Islamic schools in Central Kalimantan but have not specifically used compassion as a curricular basis.

The inadequacy of the existing literature lies in several important aspects. First, most research on character education in madrasas still uses a conventional, normative-doctrinal approach without exploring compassion as an integrative curricular basis. Muawanah et al. (2022) evaluated the tahfiz

program in madrassas but focused more on the managerial aspect without touching the affective dimension of affection. Second, research examining love-based curriculum in the context of Islamic education remains very limited, especially research that uses theoretical frameworks that integrate Islamic perspectives on mahabbah with contemporary educational theories such as the ethics of care and positive education. Third, there has been no research that comprehensively analyzes how the love-based curriculum is implemented in three dimensions simultaneously, vertical with Allah, horizontal with others, and intellectual with science, in the Tsanawiyah madrasah environment. This gap is a novelty that this research aims to fill.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to analyze the implementation of a love-based curriculum in the formation of Islamic character of students at MTS Darunnajah Jakarta which includes the dimensions of love for Allah, love for others, and love for science; (2) identify the strategies used by teachers in integrating the values of compassion into the learning process in Madrasah Tsanawiyah; and (3) evaluate the impact of the implementation of a love-based curriculum on the formation of students' Islamic character. This research aims to address shortcomings in previous research by offering a more comprehensive and integrative perspective on love-based curriculum within the context of formal Islamic education.

The argument to be tested in this study is that a love-based curriculum, implemented systematically and integratively across three dimensions (vertical, horizontal, and intellectual), is more effective in shaping students' Islamic character than the doctrinal, conventional character education approach. This working hypothesis is built on the premise that compassion is a core value in Islamic teachings that is universal and transformative, so that when used as a curricular basis, it will result in a deeper and more authentic internalization of values in students.

B. Methods

This research uses a qualitative case-study design. The selection of a qualitative approach is based on the purpose of the research: to understand in depth the phenomenon of implementing a love-based curriculum in the natural context of the Tsanawiyah madrasah. The case study design was chosen because this study focuses on a single unit of analysis, namely the implementation of a love-based curriculum at MTs Darunnajah Jakarta, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study. This approach is in line with the view of Creswell and Creswell (2023) who state that case studies are the right research strategy to explore programs, events, or activities in detail in a limited context.

The location of the research is MTs Darunnajah Jakarta, which was selected purposively based on the following criteria: (a) it is a tsanawiyah madrasah that has implemented a curriculum with a compassion-based approach for at least two academic years; (b) have a vision and mission that

explicitly includes the values of rahmah and mahabbah; and (c) obtain A accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasahs. The research was carried out for six months, from August 2024 to January 2025, which included the onboarding, exploration, and data confirmation stages. The presence of researchers at the research site serves as both the main instrument and a data collector. Researchers were present in madrasahs intensively during the research period to observe participants, build rapport with informants, and collect data naturally. The presence of researchers has been communicated to all research subjects through an official research permit issued by the institution.

The research informants were determined using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Key informants include: madrasah head (1 person), deputy head of madrasah for curriculum (1 person), character education coordinator (1 person), teacher of Akidah Akhlak, Fiqh, Al-Qur'an Hadith, and SKI subjects (1 person each), BK teacher (1 person), and students of grades VII, VIII, and IX (3 people selected based on the teacher's recommendation). The total number of informants is 18 people. The selection of informants is based on their direct involvement in implementing a love-based curriculum.

The data collection technique uses three main methods. First, participant observation was carried out to directly observe the learning process in the classroom and extracurricular activities, teacher-student interaction, and madrasah culture, which reflect the values of compassion. Observation was carried out using guidelines compiled from love-based curriculum indicators. Second, in-depth interviews are conducted semi-structurally using interview guidelines developed from the research's theoretical framework. Interviews were conducted individually, with an average duration of 60-90 minutes per session, and were recorded with the informant's consent (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Third, document analysis is conducted on madrasah curriculum documents, Learning Implementation Plans (RPPs), character education programs, teacher anecdotal notes, and learning evaluation documents.

The development of research instruments is carried out through several stages: (a) the preparation of instrument grids based on the theoretical framework; (b) development of observation guides, interview guidelines, and document analysis sheets; (c) instrument validation through expert judgment by two Islamic education experts and one research methodology expert; and (d) test instruments in other madrasahs to ensure the readability and suitability of instruments. Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion/verification. Data condensation is carried out through the process of selection, focusing, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of data from field notes and interview transcripts. Data presentation is conducted as descriptive narratives,

matrices, and networks. The drawing of conclusions is carried out in stages, starting from provisional conclusions to verified conclusions. Data validity checks are carried out through four criteria: (a) credibility through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking; (b) transferability through a rich and thick description; (c) dependability through a systematic trail audit; and (d) confirmability through transparent documentation of the entire research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Implementation of a Love-Based Curriculum in Three Dimensions

The study's findings show that the implementation of the love-based curriculum at MTS Darunnajah Jakarta is carried out through three integrated dimensions. The first dimension is the love of Allah (*hubbullah*), which is expressed through daily Qur'an recitation programs, congregational prayers, joint prayers before and after learning, and weekly Islamic studies. The head of the madrasah explained that "all religious programs are designed not as a formal obligation, but as a means of fostering students' love for Allah through meaningful spiritual experiences." Observational data showed that 87% of students voluntarily participated in the *tahfiz* program outside of mandatory hours, indicating the growth of intrinsic motivation in worship.

The second dimension is love for others (*hablun minannas*) which is manifested through peer mentoring programs, routine social service, deliberation-based conflict resolution, and a culture of mutual respect. The results of the interview with the character education coordinator revealed that the peer mentoring program involves grade IX students serving as mentors to grade VII younger siblings in both academics and social adaptation. Documentation data shows a 64% decrease in bullying cases since this program was implemented two years ago. Table 1 presents comparative data on cases of code violations before and after the implementation of the love-based curriculum.

The third dimension is the love of science (*hubbul 'ilmi*) which is implemented through a fun learning approach, mini-research projects, digital literacy based on Islamic values, and appreciation for the learning process. The vice head of curriculum stated that "learning is designed so that students fall in love with the learning process, not just chasing grades." Observation data from the classroom showed that teachers used a contextual approach that connected the subject matter to students' real lives and Islamic values. As many as 78% of the students interviewed stated that they feel more motivated to learn because of the caring and supportive classroom atmosphere.

Table 1. Comparison of Cases of Violation of Rules Before and After the Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum

Yes	Types of Violations	Before (2022)	After (2024)	Change (%)
1	Bullying	24 cases	9 cases	-62,5%
2	Clashes between classes	8 cases	1 case	-87,5%
3	Absence without permission	156 cases	67 cases	-57,1%
4	A violation of etiquette	45 cases	12 cases	-73,3%
5	Destruction of facilities	12 cases	3 cases	-75,0%

Source: Documentation data of MTs Negeri 1 Malang City, 2024

Teachers' Strategies in Integrating the Value of Compassion

The research findings identified four main strategies that teachers use in integrating the value of compassion into learning. The first strategy is exemplary (*uswah hasanah*), where teachers demonstrate a consistent attitude of compassion in their interactions with students. Classroom observations show that teachers greet students with smiles and personal greetings at the beginning of learning, respond positively to each student's learning efforts, and show empathy when students face difficulties. One of the teachers of Akidah Akhlak stated: "I cannot teach love if I myself do not show love to children. Exemplary is the most effective curriculum."

The second strategy is habituation which is applied through a daily routine that instills the value of compassion. The "Morning Full of Blessings" program helped students start the day with Dhuha prayers, reading the Qur'an, and praying for one another. The "Friday Sharing" program helped students develop intuition and practice sharing with others. Document data shows that 92% of students have consistently participated in this habituation program over the past semester. The third strategy is positive reinforcement, implemented through a character-based appreciation system. The madrasah develops "Love Cards" that teachers give to students who show affectionate behaviors, such as helping friends, being honest, or showing a passion for learning. Table 2 shows the distribution of Love Cards by behavioral category over a semester.

The fourth strategy is reflective learning, which invites students to reflect on their learning experiences and lives through the lens of Islamic compassion. Teachers use a weekly reflection journal in which students write about their experiences related to the practice of compassion. Analysis of 150 reflection journals of students showed three dominant themes: (a) awareness of Allah's favor (35%), (b) empathy for others (40%), and (c) appreciation for science (25%). These findings indicate that reflective learning plays an important role in deeply internalizing the values of compassion.

Table 2. Distribution of Love Cards by Behavior Category for the Odd Semester 2024/2025

Yes	Behavior Categories	Number of Cards	Percentage (%)
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1	Help friends learn	187	28,4
2	Be honest and trustworthy	142	21,6
3	Demonstrate a passion for learning	134	20,4
4	Respect teachers and parents	112	17,0
5	Social care	83	12,6
	Total	658	100,0

Source: Documentation data of the MTs Negeri 1 Malang City Love Card program, 2024

The Impact of Implementation on the Formation of Islamic Character

The impact of implementing a love-based curriculum on students' Islamic character is identified in four main aspects. The first aspect is the improvement of commendable morals (akhlaq al-karimah). Observational and interview data showed a significant increase in students' honest, polite, and responsible behavior. The head of the madrasah reported that the index of code violations decreased from an average of 15 cases per month to 4 cases per month after two years of implementation. BK teachers confirmed that students showed better ability to manage emotions and resolve conflicts peacefully.

The second aspect is the increase in social empathy. Students show higher concern for others, both inside and outside the madrasah environment. The social service program, which previously had only 40% voluntary participation, increased to 85%. One of the students of grade IX stated: "Since this program has been running, I feel more concerned about my friends. If anyone is sad or in difficulty, I want to help immediately." The third aspect is increased motivation to learn. Documentation shows an increase of 11.3% in students' average academic score over the last two years. More importantly, students showed greater enthusiasm for learning, as evidenced by an increase in active participation in the classroom from 55% to 82%.

The fourth aspect is the strengthening of Islamic identity. Students demonstrate a deeper understanding of Islamic values and the ability to apply them in daily life. Interviews with students revealed that they view Islam not as a collection of shackling rules, but as a way of life full of compassion and peace. Table 3 summarizes the impact of implementing a love-based curriculum across four aspects of Islamic character and their achievement indicators.

Table 3. Summary of the Impact of the Implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum on Islamic Character

Yes	Character Aspects	Indicator	Reach
1	Commendable morals	Reduced code violations	Down 73.3%
2	Social empathy	Participation in voluntary social service	Increased from 40% to 85%
3	Learning motivation	Active participation in the classroom	Increased from 55% to 82%

4	Islamic identity	Understanding of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin	Positive paradigmatic change
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Source: Results of research data analysis, 2024

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the implementation of the love-based curriculum at MTS Darunnajah Jakarta has succeeded in shaping students' Islamic character through an integrative and holistic approach. These findings address the formulation of the first problem: how a love-based curriculum is implemented in three dimensions. The successful implementation of the three-dimensional love-based curriculum *hubbullah*, *hablun minannas*, and *hubbul' ilmi* shows that a curricular approach rooted in the value of compassion is able to create a learning environment conducive to character building. These findings are in line with the research of Umar et al. (2024) which states that an integrative approach in Islamic education that combines spiritual, social, and intellectual dimensions is more effective in shaping the character of students than a partial approach. Abdalla et al. (2024) also affirm that prophetic pedagogy, which emphasizes compassion, patience, and empathy, is a model for teachers in the Islamic educational tradition.

The dimension of love for Allah (*hubbullah*), as implemented through religious programs grounded in spiritual experiences, is a significant finding. In contrast to the findings of Muawanah et al. (2022), which emphasized the managerial aspect of the *tahfiz* program, this study found that the essence of the religious program lies in the transformation of motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic. Data showing that 87% of students participate in *tahfiz* voluntarily indicates a deep internalization of values. These findings support the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2020) published in Guilford Press, which states that intrinsic motivation develops when basic psychological needs are met, including the need for a sense of connectedness, which in this context is manifested through affection. Rachman et al. (2023) in *Tafkir* also confirmed that the internalization of religious values occurs more effectively when students experience meaningful spiritual experiences.

The findings on a 64% reduction in bullying cases through the implementation of the dimension of love for others have important implications for the development of anti-bullying programs in madrasas. These findings are consistent with the research of Heekes et al. (2022) which conducted a systematic review of the prevalence of corporal punishment in schools and found that compassion-based approaches are more effective than punitive approaches. Arifin et al. (2023) also found that the development of *karimah* moral values through an integrative learning model in madrasas can reduce aggressive behavior and increase prosocial behavior. In a broader context, Mantau and Buhungo (2024) show that the culture and traditions of education in madrasas that emphasize compassion play an important role in preventing violence.

The exemplary strategy (*uswah hasanah*) which was identified as the most effective strategy in integrating the value of compassion affirmed the central position of teachers in character education. These findings reinforce Ahmed and Chowdhury's (2024) view of *tarbiyah* as a holistic process that integrates moral, spiritual, and intellectual development, in which the teacher serves as a *murabbi* who educates with compassion. Safitri (2024) also confirmed that strengthening character education by integrating Islamic values requires teachers to serve as role models in contextual learning. The new finding from this study is that exemplary compassion requires consistency and authenticity, meaning teachers need to internalize the value of compassion before they can transfer it to students. This is in line with Islamy (2024) which emphasizes the importance of teacher religiosity in fostering students' character in the Society 5.0 era.

Findings of increased motivation to learn and academic achievement resulting from a love-based curriculum contribute to the literature on the relationship between character education and academic achievement. The increase in average academic grades by 11.3% and active participation from 55% to 82% shows that a compassionate learning environment not only impacts the affective but also cognitive aspects of students. These findings reinforce the theory of positive education proposed by Coulombe et al. (2020), which posits that students' well-being and academic achievement mutually reinforce one another through a social-ecological lens. Mukhibat et al. (2024) also found that developing a religious moderation education curriculum in Islamic educational institutions can simultaneously improve welfare and academic achievement. Vella-Brodrick et al. (2023) also found that positive education programs in secondary schools significantly impact students' mental health and well-being.

The strengthening of Islamic identity as a result of a love-based curriculum is a finding that has important theoretical significance. The change in students' perspective on Islam from a set of rules to a compassionate way of life shows a paradigmatic transformation in religious understanding. These findings support the research of Memon et al. (2021), who affirm that the fundamental goal of Islamic education is *ma'rifatullah* and the refinement of the soul and character. Supriyono et al. (2024) also found that philosophical values in traditional *pesantren* play a role in forming a positive religious identity. In the Indonesian context, Ma'arif et al. (2024) show that the formation of moderate Islamic character in *madrassas* requires an approach that emphasizes compassion and inclusivity. These findings are also consistent with Nurdin et al. (2024), who show that the development of the Islamic religious education curriculum in inclusive *madrassas* requires a student-oriented approach.

This research offers a modification of the existing theory of character education by proposing a three-dimensional love-based curriculum model (KBC-3D) as a new conceptual framework in Islamic character education. This model integrates three schools of thought: (1) the ethics of care

theory from Noddings (2015) which emphasizes caring relationships as the foundation of moral education; (2) positive education theory from Coulombe et al. (2020) and Vella-Brodrick et al. (2023) which emphasizes the importance of well-being in the learning process; and (3) the concepts of *tarbiyah* and *rahmah* in the Islamic educational tradition as studied by Ahmed and Chowdhury (2024) and Abdalla et al. (2024) which emphasize compassion as a manifestation of the nature of Allah that must be reflected in the entire educational process. The integration of these three perspectives results in a curricular model that is not only pedagogically effective but also theologically authentic.

The new contribution of this research to the development of Islamic education management lies in three aspects. First, theoretically, this research produces a KBC-3D model that can serve as a reference framework for developing a character education curriculum in madrasas. Second, practically, this study shows that the implementation of a love-based curriculum requires strong institutional commitment, continuous teacher training, and a comprehensive evaluation system as emphasized by Muzayaroh (2021) about the importance of strengthening character education in madrasas. Third, methodologically, this study demonstrates that in-depth case studies can uncover the complexity of curriculum implementation that quantitative approaches alone cannot capture. The limitation of this research lies in focusing on one madrasah so that the generalization of findings needs to be done carefully. Further research is recommended to use a multi-case design or mixed methods to test the KBC-3D model in a broader context, as Amalia et al. (2025) recommend for evaluating the compatibility of the independent curriculum with Islamic values in madrasas.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, three main points can be concluded. First, the implementation of the love-based curriculum at MTS Darunnajah Jakarta is carried out in an integrative manner through three dimensions: love for Allah (*hubbullah*) through religious programs based on meaningful spiritual experiences, love for others (*hablun minannas*) through peer mentoring programs and caring culture, and love for science (*hubbul' ilmi*) through fun contextual learning. These three dimensions reinforce each other and form a holistic education ecosystem. Second, teachers' strategies in integrating the value of compassion include four main approaches: example, habituation, positive reinforcement, and reflective learning. Example is the most fundamental strategy because the authenticity of the teacher's affection is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of other strategies. Third, the implementation of a love-based curriculum can be seen in four aspects of Islamic character: improving commendable morals, strengthening social empathy, increasing learning motivation, and strengthening Islamic identity. This study recommends that other tsanawiyah madrasahs adapt the Three-Dimensional Love-Based Curriculum model (KBC-3D) by attending to their respective local contexts. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is advised to integrate a love-based

curriculum approach in the policy of developing the madrasah curriculum nationally. Further research needs to be carried out with multi-case design and mixed methods to test the generalizability of the KBC-3D model and develop a valid and reliable Islamic character measurement instrument.

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